

THE
FOREST BARRIER

MARIAN KEITH

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The FOREST BARRIER

A NOVEL OF PIONEER DAYS

BY

MARIAN KEITH

McCLELLAND AND STEWART, LIMITED
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CONTENTS

Chapter

I	The Portage	1
II	The Prince's Feather	26
III	The Far Clearing	44
IV	Allister MacAllister	68
V	The Magic Flute.....	97
VI	The Shining Trail	119
VII	His Graduation Day	144
VIII	The Windrow	163
IX	Fire Weed.....	186
X	The Wolf Dance	217
XI	In the Land of Books.....	237
XII	The Mighty MacAllisters.....	252
XIII	The Thunder-bolt	271
XIV	Jewel to the Rescue	284
XV	Jephtha's Daughter	300



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THE FOREST BARRIER

CHAPTER I

THE PORTAGE

IT was a June morning in the little backwoods settlement, and the whole population were taking a holiday. Everyone was either hurrying down to the lake shore, or looking out eagerly across the water from his shanty door. Bearded men in rough homespun; short-skirted, bare-foot women; half-clad children came swarming down the stumpy path. For it was the great day in the life of the remote clearing; the day the fortnightly boat from the south came surging round the wooded point.

The proprietor of the King's Arms, a clean flour sack tied round his lean waist to do honour to his expected guests, was running in and out of his log tavern. The cooper had left his litter of sweet-smelling shavings at his shanty door; the blacksmith had ceased his music and stood, in his leather apron, his hammer over his shoulder. Down in his mill by the bank of the stream, named by a homesick Scot, the Gala Water, the miller stood in the sunlight in his wide door-way, the big water-wheel thundering musically behind him.

This little northern lake, piercing the solid green of the forest like a blue lance, was the end of a great highway: the Hurontario Road, a narrow tortuous passage tunnelled through the bush from the capital of Upper Canada to its far shores. From the end of this highway, a sail-boat transported the incoming settlers across to the little clearing on the north shore. Here was the beginning of a ten-mile portage westward across the swamp to the headwaters of the great Waubaushene river that found its way by many miles of forest into the waters of Lake Huron.

Young Malcolm Walker, the Portage teamster, came rattling slowly down the stumpy road in his carrier's train of two great ox-wagons. Next to the arrival of the boat, Malcolm Walker going down to meet it was the grandest pageant in the settlement. He stood up in the front wagon, a giant Greatheart, ready to convoy the pilgrims on their journey, and thunderously exhorted his oxen as they lumbered indifferently forward.

"H-a-w, there! H-a-w, Moses! Gee up there! Gee, I say! Giddap, you, Moses; Whatter ye doin'? *H-a-w!* Hey, there Aaron! Get outo' that! What ye mean by gettin' up there? What good'll that do ye? *H-a-w!* Did ye hear me say, H-a-w? Well, I didn't mean ye to stand and drop dead, did I? *G-e-e-e-e*, will ye? Gee, there!"

His roars, mingled with the rattling of the wagons, went far out over the shining placid lake, and the forest aisles reverberated with the mighty sound of his going.

A harsh, ugly place was this backwoods clearing; a jagged line of grey log shanties, surrounded by stumpy fields and burned timber; a scar on the face of nature's loveliness. At its eastern edge, an Indian encampment afforded the only picturesque touch. A group of cone-shaped teepees had sprung up behind a line of giant cedars, and little curls of blue smoke rose from the camp fires. Little, brown, naked boys ran in and out, elf-like, among the trees, and a group of squaws squatted on the ground apart and wove their baskets and reed mats. The warriors were down by the water, squatting on the sand or stretched full-length beside their upturned canoes, waiting to paddle the settlers down the great river when they had passed the portage. Tall, splendid fellows, they were, in their gay shirts and leggings—a picturesque costume that displayed a goodly expanse of shining bronze limbs.

A heavy log bridge crossed the Gala Water by the mill, and over it rode the man who ruled all this little settlement, and the forest for miles on every side. Behind him came an empty carriage and pair, the driver, in a shabby livery, sitting very straight because of the importance of this great occasion.

To the early settlers accustomed only to oxen, these horses were a great sight. Captain Osborne, the rider—a man in his early forties, handsome, erect and soldierly—was worth all the glances that went his way. This was a great day for him, too. His long-expected friends from the Old Country were due to arrive; the friends who were

to help him in his great schemes for opening up and settling Osborne Township.

There were his wife's cousins, the Challoners, who had been given a grant of five-hundred acres along the lake east of the Portage, and there was his old friend and comrade, Percy Hadding, returning after a year's absence, and bringing his wife and family. Hadding's wife and Challoners' sisters would be companions for his wife and daughter, and he would be able to keep them at home instead of at the expensive Capital.

It was in the early twenties when the Province of Upper Canada was in the making. Large grants of land were being given to half-pay officers and others who were willing to become actual settlers. Captain Osborne had been given the Township that bore his name: "For conspicuous service rendered his Government," so the grant read. He had further been appointed by the Governor of Upper Canada, who was his friend, to see to the settlement of the whole of Waubaushene County in which his land was situated. He had spent a great deal of money, had given work to many new-comers, enabling them to live until their land should yield them a harvest, and had in many other ways helped to open up the country.

So far he had worked alone but this was the beginning of a new day. What wouldn't he accomplish with Percy Hadding and Norval Challoner on either hand?

As his horse pranced over the log bridge a shadow fell over his dreams. His eye caught the

figure of the miller standing in his doorway. An imposing figure the miller was, tall and commanding. He was white and floury from the crown of his fair hair to his mealy moccasins, and he stood in the sunshine like a priest at the altar, ministering at his high office of giving bread to a hard-working people. But Miles Hardy never addressed the Captain with the deference other men showed him. He owned the mill and a few acres of land back of it, and was an independent fellow. He read many books, and men gathered nightly at the mill to hear him talk. Captain Osborne suspected that he was a radical with dangerous republican views.

When the rider and carriage had passed, Hardy turned with twinkling eyes to his helper who was carrying a sack of oatmeal on his back to the store-room.

"For a' that and a' that," he said, waving his hand towards the retreating horseman.

For a' that and a' that, George,
Their Government Grants, and a' that,
The rank is but the Guinea stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that.

George merely grunted and passed on. Miles was always quoting Robbie Burns or some such stuff, which he didn't understand, not being Scotch, for which he gave thanks daily. Besides, he was in a hurry to get the meal away and go down to the shore.

Hardy strode off to where his water-wheel was thundering, singing to its accompaniment at the top of his musical voice:

For a' that and a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that.

Captain Osborne drew up under the creaking sign of the King's Arms. The proprietor sighted the great man approaching and ran out to the lean-to cook-house to warn his wife to be on her best behaviour. Mr. Hawkins prided himself on his fine manners, when any of the gentry were present, but Mrs. Hawkins could be difficult at times, especially if a pot boiled over.

As the Captain paused at the low veranda he overheard high words.

"Mrs 'Awkins," the little man was saying, in a voice of suppressed fury, and even in his rage he spoke with something of dignified restraint, "Mrs. 'Awkins, I'm forced to inform you that if you keep on a-torkin' I shall certainly be obliged to give you a blow!"

He called it a "Blough," with a terrifying intonation. But Mrs. Hawkins was no underling, "Come along, Mr. 'Awkins," she was saying, "Come along! It'll be blough for blough, sir!"

Evidently she had assumed the offensive for he burst from the cook-house door and almost fell at the horse's feet.

"Well, well, Hawkins," cried the Captain, "What's all the hurry? Is the King's Arms afire?" The twinkle in the gentleman's eye made the little man tingle with apprehension.

"Ow, and is that you, Captain? Oh, it aint nothink, just nothink at all, sir. Mrs. 'Awkins she will 'ave her joke, sir, bein' that playful, like. She sees you a-comin' sir, bein' that quick like,

and she says to me, says she, 'Carn't ye run an' 'old the gentleman's 'orse,' ses she. I see the boats is on their w'y, sir. This is a great d'y for you, Captain, sir."

"It will probably be a great day for you, too, Hawkins. You will likely have a full house to-night. There is a boat-load of settlers to go over the Portage."

"All set, sir. The King's Harms, sir, is always open for whoever comes, sir, in a manner o' speakin' like."

Captain Osborne turned and rode down towards the shore, the big lumbering carriage following.

They drew up for a moment before the Government Agency buildings and store-houses. Here the Captain had his offices, and despatched all the business of the settlements over which he was absolute monarch.

"Everything's ready, Captain," Pierson, his assistant said, hurrying out, "Jerry's wife has the rooms arranged so that if the ladies are too tired to drive to the Birches immediately they can rest and have dinner. There are more fleas than comfort demands, under mine host Hawkins's roost."

"Very thoughtful of you, indeed, Pierson. How is the wine-cellar? Challoner was a rare connoisseur in the old days. He'll need some stimulant when I show him the rock elms on his place!"

A small man, with a good-humoured Irish face came out of the building; Jerry Connor, the guard of the store-houses. He saluted with military smartness, for Jerry had once been a corporal in

a renowned regiment of the line. He marched importantly behind the Captain's horse as they moved down to the shore.

The boat with its flotilla of row-boats and canoes had already rounded the point, and Osborne eagerly raised his field-glasses that he might get a glimpse of his friend Hadding and be assured that he had really returned.

Mr. Percival Hadding, returning to the back-woods with his reluctant family and some rather apprehensive friends, leaned eagerly forward over the gunwale of the little vessel. There, far on the opposite shore was his new home, the broad acres which were to re-establish his depleted family fortune. He glanced around with pleasure at the flotilla of boats and canoes laden with settlers and their effects. These were the tenants who would probably settle on his estate. He vowed he would be a good landlord. Already he was popular with the folk at the Portage, who had dubbed him the Squire. He was feeling very happy and very hopeful in spite of his wife's disappointment in the country. He smiled at the little party lying about on the deck seats. The boat was a great relief to aching muscles strained on the rack of ninety miles of a torturing road.

He stood up, his hand on the shoulder of the boy at his side.

"See, Basil, all that land to the west of the Point there is ours—yours some day. And all back from the shore as far as you can see, and it runs back for miles!"

The boy looked out silently. He was a handsome lad of about thirteen with pouting lips and a petulant face. The miles of forest did not create any enthusiasm in him.

His father took his field-glasses and handed them to the lady who was lying back in a deck chair at his side.

"Look, Adelaide," he said eagerly, "You can see your new home!"

He pointed to the shore where, behind a picturesque fringe of white stemmed birches, mirrored in the still green water, stood a comfortable group of buildings, surrounded by green, though stumpy, fields.

Hadding's wife raised her quivering eye-lids.

"My head aches so, Percy, dear, that I cannot look across the water," she said reproachfully.

To Hadding's wife the journey since they had landed in Upper Canada had gradually grown worse until it had become unendurable. She had wept every mile of the agonizing wagon-ride from the Capital. The awesome loneliness of the dark forests that closed round them like prison walls, the fearsome noises of the night, the intolerable pests, flies and mosquitoes, from which there was never a moment's relief, the hideous disorder of the stumpy, smoky clearings, the actual physical suffering endured on the terrible roads, which made even the stops at the dirty ill-smelling taverns welcome, had all reduced her to a state of utter despair.

An anxious-eyed girl of eighteen sat by her mother's side and held her hand, while a restless

little lass of eight bounced about at her feet. This small person seemed the only one of the party who was really enthusiastic. She was pleased with everything. She jumped from her nurse's detaining hand and gazed over the railing.

"Oh, I see it, Papa!" she cried, "See all the lovely stumps for play-houses! And, Oh, all the trees have had their trunks painted white, Mamma!"

Her father smiled at her tenderly. "Here's one true pioneer, Challoner," he said.

The tall, thin man at his side smiled down at the little bright face.

"I wish you would give the rest of your sex some of your enthusiasm, Julia, darling," he said. He leaned over the railing and drew in a breath of the spicy air, perfumed with a thousand miles of balsam and pine and cedar; "Ah, it really is good, though! What a relief to get the horizon pushed back for a little. 'Pon my soul, Hadding, the thing has been positively obtrusive these past days. And now, where are my ancestral trees growing?"

Hadding handed him the field-glasses. "Straight east there along the shore is all yours for miles and miles. It's beautiful beyond even your poetic dreams."

Challoner swept the shore beyond the white Birches with his glasses, a solid wall of forest rising from the water's edge and repeated in its green depths.

"I've no doubt of it," he said whimsically, "If one could only see it. But the trees, Percy! Trees,

trees and more trees! If they were stones I'd know what to do with them."

"Wait for a few years. Osborne had a couple of acres of yours cleared back there and he says it's the richest land in the township. When you build on it you can sit at your door and look north, east and west and say, these acres, as far as I can see, are mine."

Challoner dropped the glasses with a sigh. The boy picked them up.

"And where is my part, Papa?" he asked.

His father laughed. "This is a much bigger country than you have any notion of, Basil. Yours is far north out of sight. Some day we shall ride out and see it." He could not keep a quiver of pride from his voice as he said it.

"There'll be plenty of good shooting, won't there? I may have a gun, may I not, Papa?"

"Please, please, Papa," cried the little girl jumping up. "See! There is the woman with the lovely baby in the Indian boat!"

A few of the flotilla of canoes and boats had come nearer the large vessel. All were crammed with settlers: bearded men and shawled women, and mosquito-bitten children. They looked weary, but eager and hopeful. A canoe, paddled by four bronze Indians, slipped silently alongside. In it sat a young woman alone, with two children, her household treasures piled behind her.

"There she is!" cried Julia Hadding. "The baby that's got dandelions for hair!"

Julia had discovered this wonderful baby at the landing before they had taken to the boats. There

was apparently no papa to take care of mother and baby. There was only a boy in a grey coat and kilt, who was a little taller than herself but not so tall as Basil. The baby had sat up on the boy's knee and crowed and laughed aloud. Julia had gone close to them but the little boy had held the baby away, and very tight in his arms. His mother had gone to see about a boat to take them across the lake, he said. But he would not let her hold the wonderful baby, not for even the tiniest minute, nor Bidsey either, and Bidsey knew everything about holding babies. But the boy had said his mother had told him he must not let little Ailison out of his arms.

He was waving his cap to her now, across the water. He was more friendly now that the waves bobbed between them. Julia returned the salute rapturously. He was a nice boy after all. He had big brown eyes like the baby's but his curly hair was only black. He laughed a great deal and did not seem to be ever cross like Basil. But his mother had enveloped the baby completely in a shawl.

"Marcie," whispered the little girl to her elder sister, "I think the baby must have gone to sleep, don't you?"

"Yes, dear," said the anxious-eyed girl absently, "It probably has."

"Marcie!"

"Well, dear?"

"Where's the baby's papa?"

"I don't know, child."

"Why isn't he with them?"

"Perhaps he went ahead to get the home ready as Papa did for us."

"But why didn't he come to fetch them as Papa did?"

"I don't know, Juju. I think they are immigrants from Scotland, and are probably too poor."

The little girl gazed at the canoe for some time in silence.

"Marcie!"

"Yes, dear."

"Their mother doesn't cry, does she?"

"No."

"Is she glad they came to Upper Canada?"

"I don't see how she could be," said the elder girl drearily.

She looked across the strip of foaming water at the young woman in the canoe, sitting with her baby in her arms and her little boy at her feet. She was leaning forward looking ahead with the rapt face of a pilgrim getting her first glimpse of the Celestial City. The contrast was so great that Marcia Hadding glanced involuntarily at her mother.

The Misses Challoner, refreshed a little by the sail, were now sitting erect looking out. These ladies were past their earliest youth and the journey had been especially difficult for them.

"That woman reminds me of someone, or some old picture," the younger said.

"And she can smile and look hopeful at the end of that frightful wagon-journey!" exclaimed Harriet Challoner, "and in contemplation of *that*." She waved a despairing hand in the

direction of the solid ring of forest where lay her brother's broad acres.

"I know," said Lucy Challoner, the younger sister, with determined cheerfulness. "She is like the picture that used to hang in the nursery, do you remember, Harriet? Christiana approaching the Celestial City!"

Mrs. Hadding opened her languid eyes and looked across at the radiant woman in the canoe.

"And she is approaching a prison instead, poor wretch. And she does not look like one of those pioneer women inured to hard work either."

"Not a prison, dear Adelaide," Lucy Challoner said, "a new home."

"No, a prison! And so are we." She turned to her elder daughter. "Oh, Marcia, darling, it's worse for you than me. How shall we endure the loneliness and the ugliness; think of our dear English downs."

She buried her face in the cushions and wept again. The wearied daughter could only stroke her heaving shoulders in silent pity.

There was a shout ahead and a rope was hurled towards the landing. The next moment, with a few skilful strokes of paddles and oars, the whole fleet was moored; and Indians, explorers and settlers—gentle and common—were landed on the stumpy shore of the Upper Canada clearing.

The little party of land-owners stepped upon the new soil with something like a feeling of hope, for Osborne was here with outstretched hands. "Welcome Home!" he cried as each one touched the rough logs of the landing.

The long, low-ceilinged house at the Government Building for the accommodation of incoming travellers was clean and cool, and the ladies were conducted thither while the gentlemen repaired to their friend's office to transact any necessary business and see to the loading of their furniture.

After a dinner, served by the Corporal's wife and the Hadding servants, little Julia was sent off with a maid and bidden be very good and quiet while her mamma rested and tried to get some sleep. Bidsey was needed at her mother's side so she was despatched with Maggie, a younger girl.

Julia wanted to go down to the landing again and see what had happened to the lovely baby, and Maggie was nothing loath. Maggie was a good-looking lass from Scotland and a canny one, too. Her chief object in coming to the new country, as she frankly confessed, was to get a good man and a good home. And there, the moment she had set foot on the new soil was the man who was the perfect fulfilment of all her dreams. Young Malcolm Walker, mounted on the ox-wagon and roaring at his team as they went heaving and clattering over the rough trail typified everything she was looking for in the new land.

Most of the settlers were destined for points down the Waubauskene river and were preparing to journey over the portage that led westward into the wilderness. For the pioneer of Upper Canada coveted above all prizes a bit of land to call his own. So he passed by the great estates. No more renting for him! Malcolm's big wagons were already piled high with boxes and bundles, women

and children. The Indians, their long canoes balanced lightly upon their heads, were trotting away down the carrying-way into the forest to be ready to launch the travellers on the waters of the river.

Little Julia Hadding seated herself at Maggie's side on a log to watch the wonderful sight. Looking anxiously round for the mother of the lovely baby, she espied them disappearing into the office of the agency. As Maggie had already caught the eye of the young giant on the foremost wagon load, her small charge slipped away, and ran back to the building.

She dared not follow them into the office but there was a squared log at the edge of the veranda for a step and she seated herself, her eyes on the door. But she waited and waited and nobody came. Maggie seemed to have disappeared altogether, too, like Marcia and her Mother and Bidsey. She had forgotten in which of those long buildings she had left them. She was surely all alone in this strange new world. Two great tears rolled down her round cheeks.

At that moment the door of the office opened and out came the little boy with the grey kilt.

Allister MacAllister of the black curls and the laughing eyes had a very tender heart. He did not like to see anyone cry. He sat down on the other end of the log step and regarded the weeping damsel with consternation. Julia Hadding peeped at him from behind her small handkerchief with some return of hope. Allister put his hand into the small pocket of his kilt. He had not many

treasures, but the chief one was a glass alley with pink stripes. It was a beautiful thing and he loved it, but this was a very sad case and something had to be done. He held it out to her on the brown palm of his hand.

Miss Julia Hadding felt better immediately. She put out her small gloved hand and took the treasure. She held it for a little while, and though she did not cry any more, she did not give it quite the reception that the young man thought was its due.

"Isn't it very beautiful?" he enquired encouragingly.

"Yes," she admitted, "It's very pretty, but I wasn't crying for a marble."

Allister looked like one who had made the supreme sacrifice in vain.

"What were you crying for?" he asked a little less sympathetically.

"I was crying for a baby. I like your baby, and now your mother has taken it away."

There seemed no way to meet this trouble. "My mother couldn't give you our baby," he said firmly, "She's the only one we have."

Then he had a sudden inspiration. Up at the tavern where he and his mother had eaten their dinner, were rows and rows of babies. He took hold of Julia Hadding's hand.

"I know where there are hundreds and hundreds of babies!" he cried, "Come on! I'll show you!"

Hundreds of babies! Julia Hadding clutched his hand and ran with him. There would surely be enough to spare her one.

They stormed up the dusty, stumpy road to the tavern at the corner; and there, squatted on the ground at the edge of the veranda, each with a basket of bead and quill work at her moccasined feet, sat a stolid row of squaws trying to sell their wares while their braves were away down the portage. But it was not to the lovely sweet-hay baskets but to the back row that Allister led the little girl. Strapped to each mother's back was a little bundle. At the top of each bundle was a small, round, black head and wee brown face with a pair of black, beady eyes that looked out stolid and unwinking on a strange world. There were not quite a hundred, but there really were seven of them—seven lovely, little bronze dollies all in a row. The sight went to the head of Julia Hadding. She ran up and down the line in unbelieving wonder. She squealed with delight. She clapped her hands and capered and laughed, while the shoulders that supported the babies heaved with mirth.

The little white girl took a run at the first papoose, stooped, and gently kissed the little soft brown face. It was delicious. She darted to the next, and the next, like a humming bird among flowers. The little boy laughed and danced with her. Being a boy he could not, of course, go around kissing babies. But this was great fun. Julia, encouraged by his applause, started again at the other end and began kissing her way up the line once more, both children screaming with delight while the squaws joined their loud laughter.

The noise attracted the gentlemen who were sitting in the tavern. Captain Osborne came to the door and beckoned to Hadding whose astonished gaze fell upon his daughter's astounding performance.

He captured her amid loud laughter, slipped a coin into the basket at each mother's feet, and led the little girl away to the agency where he had a serious word with the weeping Maggie.

Allister MacAllister, forsaken, went slowly back to his mother who was already at the door looking out anxiously. She caught him swiftly to her. "Allister, you must not leave Mother so. Do you hear? How could you when you are the only man I have?"

The little fellow hung his head. He told the whole story of the little girl and the glass alley, and the brown babies.

"Aren't we going on to where father is?" he asked, when it was all told. "Everybody's going but us, mother."

It seemed so to her, too. All the kind, neighborly folk, who had befriended her on the way from Toronto, had come to say good-bye, and were off down the Portage. There was no one going away north to the MacAllister settlement but herself. And she had no idea of how to get there. And the agent seemed so busy over the affairs of the gentry that there was no time to give to her. He had said a dozen times that he would see to her case, and now the afternoon was waning, and she should have been on her way.

The little Irish Corporal, who was the guard of

the store-houses, came and went with a kindly word, and the assurance that they would attend to her soon; but he, too, was busy seeing that the great wagons of household furniture for the Hadding and the Challoner homes were loaded from the boat and sent off. There seemed nothing for her but to face another night at the tavern, and her resources were low and the place made her shudder. But she was all undaunted. She who had faced an ocean voyage alone was not to be discouraged by anything now that her husband and her new home were but twenty miles away.

At last Pierson hurried in and seating himself at his desk went into her case.

"The MacAllister Settlement!" he cried, and gave a dismayed whistle. He took a map from the drawer and spread it out. "Yes, the MacAllisters are on the ninth and the tenth concessions, but they are just beyond Osborne township."

She was the wife of Neil MacAllister, she explained. Her husband and his four brothers had taken up land in one settlement.

He noticed that her speech was that of a woman of education and refinement and gave stricter attention. She seemed to be of the gentry though she was going to an immigrant settlement. Yes, of course, he remembered the MacAllister brothers, four of them with their families who came out some few years ago. And there was another brother had come last year with his mother and sister.

That was her husband, she explained. She was to have come, too, but was prevented. She glanced

at the little golden head on her shoulder. So she was planning to come out in August, but some friends were coming as far as Montreal and she suddenly decided to come with them, and her husband did not know she was here. She had written but did not suppose he would get the letter. The agent shook his head. No mails for that part of the country. It was probably lying at the Portage post office.

"I think you had better wait here until your husband comes for you," he said at last.

"But why?" she asked. She understood that it was but twenty miles from the Portage to the MacAllister settlement.

"Twenty miles!" the agent shrugged and shoved the map in front of her. True, it was twenty miles as the crow flies, but only a crow could go there for there wasn't even a blazed trail.

"You see," he said with some asperity, "when the MacAllisters came in, Captain Osborne made them a very fine offer of land just within a stone's throw of this settlement. But they refused it."

"They were to be his tenantry," the little woman put in looking at him with steady level gaze.

"And why not? The terms were excellent."

"Not one of the MacAllisters would have torn up his roots from the old soil," she said quietly, "but for one thing; the hope of settling on his own land."

He turned to the map again. And how had her husband gone in with his aged mother and his

sister? she asked. What they had done she could do.

Here was the road they took, he ran his pencil over it. There was a sort of road for about ten miles east along the lake; Squire Hadding had opened it out for two miles past his home. Then there was a road running north, for there were settlements here, the Murphys and the O'Connors. It was possible to get from their settlement to the English Block. The MacDonalds and a crowd of Yorkshire men were settled there. That would bring her just about ten or twelve miles east of the MacAllister settlement. He had heard that the MacAllisters had made a winter road out to the Block for there was a mill there. She might be able to get a wagon and a man to drive her as far as the English Block, but he could not tell what she would do then.

It was very plain to Mary MacAllister, sitting with her baby in her weary arms and with her tired boy leaning heavily against her, that this man did not feel that her plight was his affair. To be sure he was here to look after the incoming settlers, but his master's attitude towards those who refused to avail themselves of his offer was generally one of indifference and Pierson copied the Captain in every way.

"You might be able to hire someone at the tavern," he said at last.

At that moment the little corporal put his head in at the door. Sure the gintry was goin' and would he come and see that everything was right.

The agent hurried away, and Mary MacAllister gathered her shawl about her baby and rose.

"Come Allister, my man," she said and her mouth was tight and her head high. She went out to the veranda and sat for a little on the bench trying to plan what she had better do. She had thought she had only to drive twenty miles farther to be with Neil. And now she must see to having her boxes stored at the agency and find a place for the night.

Captain Osborne's carriage was drawn up before the door of the other building. The ladies of the Hadding party were evidently leaving.

Little Allister leaned against her. "Oh, Mother I'm hungry," he complained.

The little Corporal came past, "Sure, ye'r jist all tired out," he exclaimed kindly. "If the gentry and all their fal-der-als would only move out now, me and me wife would be givin' ye a bed." He dropped his voice and came closer. Sure and what did he care whether she was settling in Osborne Township or not? To the divil with Osborne Township was what he said. Didn't his own brother Mike take up land in it, the most God-forsaken swamp it was in the whole of Upper Canada! And he pulled out in six months did Mike. And he went off to the States jist because he wouldn't be renting from the gentry. Bad sez to them all for coming over and grabbin' up all the land and not a one of them knowin' the head of an axe from the tail.

Mary MacAllister was puzzled. "But aren't you employed here?" she asked.

He gave a humorous twist to his face. "Whisht, or the pig'll hear ye, as me mother used to say." He hurried away, and she sat on patiently, wondering if Pierson would return and suggest something. But the evening shadows were falling and the mosquitoes were beginning their tormenting work. At last she arose. She gave her bag to the little boy, gathered the shawl about the whimpering baby, and turned away. And as she stood on the log step looking about at the drear stumpy clearing, at the greying lake and the lengthening shadows of the great trees, there came along the rough path from the landing a tall white figure. He reached the little woman in one stride.

"Is it Neil MacAllister's wife you are?" he asked, taking her hand in his great one. "My name is Hardy, Miles Hardy. Your husband and his mother and sister stayed with us when they went through, and I mind well when the four brothers and their families came. Man, that was a great day! Their own land or no land, was what Hector MacAllister said!" He was gathering the baby into his arms and taking possession of her bag while he talked. "Come away! You'll stay with the wife to-night. She's been expecting folks all day, and she'll be the disappointed woman if she doesn't get somebody. Come! We'll see about sending you after Neil in a day or two!"

The baby went to him unexpectedly without a whimper. He slung the bag over him arm and gave his free hand to the little boy, and Mary MacAllister followed him down the rough pathway, her step grown light. Miles Hardy, the miller of

Gala Water! Hadn't Neil told her about him, indeed, and his great kindness to all travellers.

As they passed down to the main road of the settlement the party from the agency was being placed in the carriage, the ladies heavily veiled against the mosquitoes. As Squire Hadding's wife seated herself, there came from the darkening woods at hand the long moaning hoot of the owl.

"Oh, what is that?" she cried in terror, and buried her face in her shuddering hands.

"A poor thing, that, for a pioneer!" Mary MacAllister said to herself as she passed, her head erect.

The little girl leaned from the carriage and called, "Good-bye, little boy. Good-bye, Allister MacAllister!" and the little boy stumbling wearily along waved his cap and called good-bye.

They stopped at a long log house beside the stream, with a hedge of sun-flowers and hollyhocks blazing before it. From the open door a young woman stepped swiftly; a comely woman with pink cheeks and shining black hair that lay in tight waves along her brow. She came with outstretched arms and took the baby into them. There was a baby here, too, in a deep cradle by the door and another little one crawling about the floor, and the place was clean and sweet and home-like.

The welcome was warm and heartening, and the supper enough even for the small, starved laddie. The weary traveller sank into a feather bed between clean sheets, her baby in her arms, her boy at her side and slept sounder than she had yet slept since she reached the new land.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCE'S FEATHER

JOHNNY MACALLISTER'S clearing was as busy as the bee-hive in the hollow stump at its southern edge. At last Johnny was having a barn-raising. He had been content so far with the first low shanty, built to house his meagre crops, for Johnny was what his brethren called easy-going, if a pioneer of Upper Canada could be so described; and his wife, Jane Ann, had always declared that she would rather have a flower-garden than a milk-house. They were in consequence a little behind their neighbors in the matter of building. But now Johnny had twelve acres cleared, a team of oxen and a cow, and to-day the barn was going up and would be ready for the crop now standing strong and green in the little stumpy fields.

Everybody in the settlement had come to give a hand; men, women, and children; not only his four brothers but their cousins, the Red Mac-Allisters, whose settlement lay northward across the "Big Crick." Had Johnny and Jane Ann invited their neighbors to spend an afternoon in idleness, and to eat and drink and make merry, the pioneer mind would have revolted at the mere thought. But to be bidden to help a neighbor in

a mighty task was a different matter, and if it included an hour of rare rest at the end of a day of stupendous toil, with some whiskey, and a dance for the young folk, their consciences were clear.

It had been a mighty struggle to attain this stage of a barn-raising. The MacAllisters, a quiet crofter folk, driven from their native land because there was no room for them there, had found the new land almost as unwilling to grant them a foot-hold. First the governing powers had set endless difficulties in the way of their obtaining land. And when the coveted prize was at last won she proved equally unwilling to yield them a home. In desperation they turned upon her. With their one weapon, the axe, they fought as men fight only when they know that defeat means death. It was a mighty conflict, such as history has seldom recorded. For months the crashing of timbers raged on all sides, and the smoke of battle blackened the heavens. It was Man at his best, engaged in a Holy War, pitting all his strength against Nature instead of his fellow-man. Slowly and painfully he advanced, foot by foot Nature retreated. And now the MacAllisters possessed the land, but they were not resting on their axe-handles. Every new ash-strewn clearing was an outpost of the advancing host; every barn was a fortress. And to-day they were erecting another.

Over behind the old shanty-barn where the new dove-tailed logs were piled, the men were rolling them up onto the foundation, while four of the more skilled workmen stood at the corners with

their great hammers to knock the timbers into place. The Grog Boss with his stone jar moved about occasionally, giving a reward when an especially heavy log was hauled up into place. Hector, the eldest of the five brothers, always at the heavy end of a log, was shouting an occasional "Yo Heave," that sent the logs up the slippery poles as if by magic.

Hector MacAllister was the unofficial chieftain of the little confederation of clearings. His great Amphion voice had yo-heaved every barn in the settlement from the earth, and none the less his great spirit, year by year, kept urging the lives of his fellow-settlers to higher levels. There was no danger of even the remotest clearing reverting to barbarity where Hector MacAllister held sway.

Back in the dwelling-shanty, beyond the potato patch, the wives and daughters were preparing the supper, keeping a watchful eye upon the barn that they might not miss any of the most thrilling feats. They were all dressed alike in coarse grey homespun or the dark blue cotton brought in bolts from the old country, but every girl had on her best apron, and a bit of lace or ribbon, for Aunt Jane Ann would be sure to let them have a dance, and she could lilt so that the feet of you couldn't stay on the floor.

Old and young were having one of those glorious days that so rarely broke in on their lonely toil. The crowding together, the floods of talk, the noisy companionship and the laughter, the sharing of labour was a thrilling experience to those who could not see beyond the imprisoning ring of their

own clearing. Since the first gold of sunrise had kindled in the tallest pine top they had been gathering at Jane Ann's door, and all day prodigious baking operations had been in progress. Great snowy loaves, fresh from the bake-kettles, were piled upon the dresser and every available shelf. Great kettles of potatoes, their rich mealiness bursting their brown jackets, hung over the fire in both the shanty and the small lean-to used as a summer cook-house. Pans of fish, fresh from the "Big Crick" sizzled fragrantly beside them.

The girls were laying the heavy plates and cups in rows on the patch of coarse grass that grew in Jane Ann's garden space beside the shanty, for there was no table to accommodate such a crowd. This rough plot of grass beside her door, with its bright border of flowers, was Jane Ann's great achievement. It was the first flower-garden in the settlement. There had been little time in the pioneer woman's life for the ornamental, and every foot of ground wrested from the forest was needed to produce food. But Jane Ann had brought a packet of seeds from her mother's garden which grew where, "Ayr gurgling kissed his pebbled shore," and vowed she was going to have a patch of flowers with a Prince's Feather in it if she didn't have a patch of potatoes. So she had made a bit of bright beauty in the devastation of the clearing. A row of hop-poles were set against the log wall of the shanty, the feathery green vines covering its bleakness, and before them blazed sunflower and hollyhock and larkspur and money-musk. And, most glorious of all, at the

end of the bright row, reaching its plumes around the corner of the house, waved the tall flaunting blossoms of the pink Prince's Feather. It was Jane Ann's triumph. Her pioneer sisters had conquered the wilderness as well as she, but Jane Ann had raised a banner!

Granny MacAllister who was sitting on a bench by the door smoking her clay pipe and watching everything with her bright bird-like eyes, announced that it was nearly mosquito time, she could tell by the shadow on the door, and the children scampered away into the woods to get maple boughs to keep away the pests. The talk and laughter, the running to and fro were pleasantly interrupted by the children calling from their green arbor that Aunt Betsy was coming.

Betsy, Peter MacAllister's wife, was the self-appointed nurse of both settlements. Her husband and children had come to the raising, but she had been called to the Red MacAllister settlement the night before to welcome a new and small pioneer.

"For pity's sakes, it's Betsy Peter, sure enough!" Granny called from her bench.

"It never is!" cried all the other women crowding to the door.

Betsy was coming swiftly up the path that led from the corduroy road; a stout red-faced woman, straight and strong. She wore a blue sunbonnet and her grey homespun skirt was turned up showing her striped red petticoat and a pair of stout bare ankles. She had been up nearly all the

night before, had cared for the mother and newborn child, washed every soiled garment about the place, and cooked bread to last the family for a week, and was arriving at the end of a five-mile tramp through the bush, unwearied and eager for more work.

Jane Ann hurried out to welcome her, shading her eyes from the sun with her apron. There was so much help at hand that the hostess had been wandering joyously from task to task all day, leaving the responsibility to her capable sister-in-law, Jimmie's wife, who had red hair and managed everything in the settlement, Jimmie included.

"Eh, Betsy, I see ye're out takin' yer constitutional!" called Jane Ann. Everyone burst into shrieks of laughter. Jane Ann was never done with her jokes and her nonsense. Her husband, Johnny, had worked his first winter at the Portage and ever since Jane Ann had entertained the whole settlement with tales of the strange doings of the gentry there. The strangest concerned the ladies of Captain Osborne's household. They would go out every afternoon for a walk through the bush, just for no reason but walking. "A constitutional" they called it. Jane Ann had never allowed the joke to die.

Betsy seated herself on the bench beside Granny and became a rival source of interest to the new barn. She was the only woman who went about and was as good as a newspaper. They gathered about her with questions. Jane Ann brought her a cup of hot mint tea from the pot that had been brewing all afternoon by the fire, and Betsy gave

her report as she drank eagerly from her saucer.

Yes, Jessie was fine, and it was a boy this time. A fine, big, fat fellow, and Duncan was that pleased he was near daft. Jessie had had an easy time. She was just saying when Betsy left that if the baby had come on the Sabbath as she had kinda expected she would have been over to give Jane Ann a hand with the raisin'. For the bringing of a baby into the world was but a small incident in the life of a pioneer woman in the early twenties of Upper Canada.

There was a great deal more to tell and Jane Ann got herself a cup of tea and sat down to hear it all. Teenie, the red-headed, did not sit. The weight of that great supper was on her capable hands. She stepped rather ostentatiously past the idlers in a swift excursion to the cook-house.

The tall, stooped figure of Johnny Red, the Grog Boss, could be noted in its red and black striped shirt and checked trousers, moving about among the men.

"It looks to me," Jane Ann said, with an elaborate assumption of pity, "that they're overworkin' that poor buddie."

Everybody laughed but Minnie, Hector's wife, who was a very serious woman and thought Jane Ann worldly, and Granny, who could speak only Gaelic and found her two lowland daughters, Jane Ann and Teenie, a great inconvenience.

"Eh, yonder's poor Neil, next to Red Sandy," Betsy said, pouring her saucer full again, "That's too hard work for poor Neil."

"Eh, poor Neil, poor lad," said his mother in her soft Gaelic.

"He'll be all right when Mary and the wee-uns gets here," Jane Ann said cheerfully, picking up her own baby from where he was rolling in the ashes and hugging him.

Neil MacAllister was the youngest of the five brothers and had been the latest to arrive. His stooped shoulders, his long slender hands, even his gentle smile showed he was not made of the stern stuff that conquered this stubborn land. Neil had been more delicately reared than the rest. There must be a minister in this family of five sons, the father and mother had vowed, and Neil was chosen. He had managed to get schooling enough to make him a dominie, but he had married early and the great ambition had to be put aside. He had followed his brothers to the new land leaving his wife and two children behind until he could make a home for them. The new home was a great disappointment. He had not been able to get a lot near his brothers' settlement. The great estates of the gentry and the Clergy Reserves hemmed them in on all sides as though they were on an island in mid-ocean. The nearest available lot was ten miles away across a stretch of swamp belonging to the Osborne estate. His brothers had accompanied him, some fifteen miles around the swamp, and had helped him make his first clearing and put up a shanty. But the stark loneliness of the place daunted him and he hesitated to ask Mary to come to it. Mary, he knew, had the courage to face anything for a

home, but she had not been nurtured to hardness. So he had written telling her they must delay for another year, and since he had journeyed across to the English Block to send off his letter he had dreaded to go back to the far clearing by himself. So he had stayed with his brothers, moving about from clearing to clearing like a lost soul.

"Yon's an awful lonesome hole to take a woman like Mary to," said Teenie, speaking the thoughts of all present.

"It'll be awful hard on her, raised so kinda soft like she's been," said Katie, the one sister of the MacAllisters.

"Never you fear for Mary Murray," said Jane Ann, who knew this sister-in-law better than the others did. "Mary'll manage."

The other women shook their heads doubtfully. Neil's wife had belonged to a different world from theirs. She had shown fortitude and adaptation, certainly, since she left her comfortable home to marry Neil. But the pioneer women reminded themselves that even they had not known hardship and laborious days till they had come to this new land.

A shout in Hector's great commanding voice brought everyone to the door, and Teenie's little Teenie Ellen, her bright red curls flying out behind her, came bounding up the path to announce shrilly that the top logs were going up.

Everyone, even to Granny, went streaming down the path, all but Teenie. She could not let the supper spoil. But it was just like Jane Ann, she reflected, to head the procession away to the

barn. and this her own house. Some people would never get along in the world without help, Teenie told herself as she put another log on the fire and turned the fish.

* * * *

It was the tenth day of a terribly wearisome journey, and still the barque that bore Christiana and her children towards the Celestial City of Home rocked and staggered along its tempestuous voyage between the Portage and the MacAllister Settlement.

The road east from the Portage to the Irish Settlement had been distinctly bad after it had passed Squire Hadding's place. The trail through the forest north to the English Block had been distinctly worse, but these last miles into the wilderness westward were well-nigh unendurable. It was scarcely a road, this tunnel through the virgin forest. The MacAllisters had hewed it out themselves with infinite labour, that they might get their ox-sleighs out to the mill at the Block in winter. But no one had attempted it in summer except on foot. The travellers had already spent one night in the wagon; a terrifying night of thunder and lightning and falling timbers. And now it was the afternoon of the second day, and still the crack in the forest twisted and turned ahead of them seemingly without end, and no smallest sign of human habitation appeared. The great trunks of the forest, towering far above, bare of branches for fifteen feet, walled them in on all sides. Dense masses of flowering plants and underbrush, such as always seemed waiting just

beneath the surface of the forest soil to spring into being at the first sight of the sun, choked the road and almost buried the oxen. Often they obscured great mud holes into which the animals floundered. Mosquitoes and stinging flies made themselves intolerable. Frogs shrieked loudly from pools by the road, and owls hooted drearily from the dark tree canopy.

Here and there where crosswayed timbers had been laid over some unusually bad spot, the slimy water by the road-side was alive with wriggling snakes and paddling turtles, more terrifying to the little woman than even the occasional bear that lumbered away into the shadows, or the grey wild cat that hissed and spat and fled before them.

"Hooch! She'll be lossin' ta road, whateffer!" shouted the driver.

As it was the twentieth time he had made this assertion in the last two days Mary MacAllister had come to imagine that it was all the English he knew for he said little else. She had hired him and the ox wagon at the English Block settlement, because he was the only man there who could be spared from the heavy summer work. Gibbie Quait was a wandering shoe-maker, and had come with her partly out of the goodness of his heart, partly because the urge to move on had taken him, and mostly because he felt that the English Block was no fit place for a Hielanman to remain any longer.

Mary could not put by the fear that he was right and he had really lost the road. They seemed only to be getting deeper and deeper into the

trackless wilderness. The oxen floundered on while the wagon was flung hither and thither, till bodies were black and blue and bones ached, and life itself was in danger. She clung desperately to her seat and to her wailing baby, keeping a watchful eye upon her boy lest he be flung under the wheel, or the roped boxes jerk loose and descend upon him. The two children as well as herself were so bitten with mosquitoes and flies that they looked as if they had the small-pox. The baby cried incessantly from the painful pitching and tossing, her feeble wails echoing far into the stillness. Even the brave little boy had begun to whimper, and wished for the twentieth time that they would come to Aunt Jane Ann's.

And still there was no relief, for the patient oxen staggered on, now slipping down into a sea of mud, now straining to climb a hill, now getting caught hopelessly in a mass of underbrush.

The driver swore and shouted constantly at the poor brutes. He was growing more morose with every mile, for the bottle he had brought from the tavern at the English Block had long since been emptied.

"It will be ta curs-ed English Chentlemens!" He had taken to roaring forth this statement, since the one regarding the lost road seemed to have no effect upon his passenger. "Yes, yes, ta Chentlemens! They must be haffing all ta land and all ta roads!"

The oxen needed all his curses for the next half-hour. They had descended into another slimy pit, and for the tenth time Mary MacAllister was

forced to scramble out into the smothering underbrush and help unload. She seated the boy on a box, and giving him the little one to hold she put all her remaining strength into removing the load, terror lest night overtake them urging her to desperate effort.

The little boy looked at her piteously, trying to soothe the baby's wails. His face was so swollen and bitten that he had lost all his gypsy beauty.

"If I was a man, Mother," he said, making a gallant effort to keep back the tears, "I'd make that bad Captain Osborne get his axe and chop a road through here for you, wouldn't I, Mother?"

"Eh, indeed you would," she cried coming to his rescue, "It's the brave laddie mother has."

In spite of her terrors of what might be beneath the underbrush she waded waist deep in it, and knee deep in the mud and tangled weeds and helped reload. And once more they were aboard pitching and tossing to the accompaniment of the driver's roaring and cursing.

"Ah, ta noble Chentlemens!" he resumed furiously. "With their fine roads. Where is ta road ta fine Chentleman Osborne promised? Where?"

The question went roaring down the silent dark aisles of the forest but brought no answer. But Mary MacAllister was not listening to him, she was noticing, with a faster beat of her heart, that they were now on a road, not less rough but showing signs of being recently used. The underbrush had been partially cleared away and there was a patch of corduroy that looked new.

"Do you think we're near Aunt Jane Ann's now, Mother?" asked little Allister, sensing some new hope in her face.

His Mother did not answer, she was leaning forward in an attitude of tense listening. Through all this journey along the bottom of the dark forest tunnel she had been oppressed by the death-like stillness and silence about her. The rattle of their wagon and the shouts of the driver had echoed far into the vast depths as though they were the only living creatures in an ocean of forest. But now she was hearing a far sound. Her straining ears had caught something—was it singing? Already she had learned the magic power the forest has to turn all discordant sounds within it to music and send it afar like a melodious song. Perhaps it was not singing, but surely it was human voices? Or was it just her strained fancy and the anguished desire to hear a voice?

The little boy caught her skirt and cried, "What's that, Mother?" She gave a start of joy. He, too, had heard it! Breathless she hushed the baby. Yes, there it came again! It *was* music, a long chanting note, the first strains of the anthem of the Celestial City! And now the driver had heard it too. He lifted his goad and yelled the news to the oxen in an outpouring of Gaelic. Even the patient brutes seemed to know that the end of their toil was near. They swung out with something like renewed energy.

A turn in the trail round a mighty charred stump ten feet high, and there ahead through the

tree trunks shone a golden light. A Clearing! Mary MacAllister bowed her head over her baby's scarred little face. "God be praised," she sobbed.

And now the music from that golden space ahead was becoming distinct. It was the triumph song that celebrated a great conquest. The tyrant had yielded, had turned slave, had provided a citadel for the conquerors, and they were chanting the victory. Down the long, green cathedral aisles it swept, that mighty song, Hector MacAllister's great voice giving forth the triumphant command of the raising:

"Y-o H-e-a-v-e!"

The conquest of explorer, voyageur and settler, the courage of the advancing multitudes soon to fill the empty wilderness was in that mighty shout.

"Y-o H-e-a-v-e!"

The monarchs of the forest so lately laid low rose again in obedience to that conquering voice.

"Y-o H-e-a-v-e!"

And the storehouse for the precious grain leaped into being.

The little, worn traveller peering through a mist of tears sat up in obedience to that command. Her shoulders straightened. "Is it the MacAllister settlement, do you think, Gibbie?" she cried.

But the driver's gloom was not so easily dispelled.

"Hooch!" he scoffed. "Ta MacAllister she'll not pe ayont ta concession, whateffer. She'll pe there in three-four days intee."

Mary MacAllister did not make any attempt to

translate this cryptic statement. For they suddenly emerged upon road of crosswayed logs, a real highway, clear of underbrush. And then the great scene burst upon their sight. Green fields! A shanty! Women and children running about! Crowds of men about a new log building! Roaring cheers that told the barn had arisen!

Gibbie Quait turned his oxen into the road that led to the clearing. MacAllisters or no. MacAllisters, a barn-raising meant whiskey, and they must stop here in any case. And suddenly his passenger rose from her shaking seat. "It's the MacAllisters!" she screamed. "It's Johnny's! I see Jane Ann's flowers. I see her Prince's Feather!"

The women of the clearing were returning from the newly-erected barn to hurry on the supper, and stopped suddenly round the door staring at the astounding sight of a wagon piled high with boxes and kists, appearing phantom-like out of the wilderness.

For a moment everyone stood breathless and then Minnie threw shaking hands above her head and whispered:

"The Lord preserve us, is it a speerit?"

"It's her!" gasped Katie.

"It's Neil's folks, as sure as death!" screamed Betsy.

"It never is!" shouted Teenie, running out and leaving both fish and potatoes to the mercy of the fire.

Jane Ann shoved her baby into someone else's arms; she leaped the low brush fence like a fawn

and went flying down the path. Betsy was at her heels drying her hands on her apron by instinct as she ran. She was followed tumultuously by all the rest, some of the children crying out in terror at the strange sight and the fearsome commotion.

"I knew your Prince's Feather, Jane Ann!" Mary was crying from her seat on the wagon. "Your pink Prince's Feather!" she sobbed.

Jane Ann, the tears streaming down her brown face, leaped upon the wagon-wheel and took the whole scarred and worn little family into her ample arms.

The other women swarmed around them like bees about a flower. They heaped Gaelic endearments upon Mary and her children. Granny wept aloud as she took the new baby into her arms, fondling and clapping it upon the back. "Och, hoch, the beautifulest one, the loveliest, the best-beloved! *M'eudail Gheal!*" She left no endearing epithet of her lovely, tender language unsaid upon this her youngest grandchild.

And now the men at the barn had discovered that there was something still more exciting transpiring at the road, and Neil was coming across the potato patch with a dazed and unbelieving look, trampling the precious plants in his reckless haste. Mary MacAllister shoved aside her encircling sisters, and looked at her husband. Theirs was a love that many waters could not quench nor seas divide. But it could not be spoken.

"Neil, my man," was all she could say, but her face shone. Christiana had reached the Celestial City.

When the men had all swarmed down from the barn to greet the travellers there fell a sudden silence. They were an inarticulate folk, these MacAllisters. There was nothing could be said in the face of this wonder. They looked around them helplessly, each man feeling instinctively for his axe with which to express himself.

And then Hector MacAllister stood up on a low stump and bared his head. A sudden hush fell. Every head was bowed. The children stood silent and awed. The unseen was never far from these people fighting for their daily bread. It was this sense of the invisible hosts that kept them courageous in the midst of fearful odds. In the silence Hector's voice arose in a prayer of thanksgiving for the safe arrival.

When the prayer was ended and they turned again to the travellers there fell once more that feeling of embarrassment which was suddenly terminated. Teenie's little Teenie Ellen, she of the red curls and the sharp, little face, broke the silence.

"Aunt Jenann!" she cried shrilly, "the fish's all burnt to a black crisp!"

CHAPTER III

THE FAR CLEARING

MARY MACALLISTER was moving about the tasks in her shanty with the air of one intently listening. Her tall thirteen-year-old boy whom she had sent to the byre to milk the cow, and who was chasing the cat and racing with the dog, was making the clearing ring with his noise. But her ears were straining past these familiar sounds for another. For it was two days past the date for Neil's return. He must certainly come to-day. He had left three weeks before for his brother's settlement, taking the short cut they had blazed straight across the swamp. When the ice and snow began to melt it was not safe to enter its boggy depths, and the late March sun had been very warm to-day. But even if he had gone round by the fifteen-mile trail he should surely be here to-day. The deep blue shadows of the pines were stretching across the rosy flush of the snowy clearing. The bare stumps were growing purple. It would soon be night and he was not yet here.

It was almost three years since, with her baby tied on her back, she had scrambled through those fifteen miles of blazed trail behind her husband to their new home. Hector and Johnny had come

with them, taking the time they so badly needed from their own farms. They had burned up the timber they had cut down the winter before, had made the house and little byre fit for use, and had hoed up the ground between the stumps for the next spring's planting.

Since then there had been unremitting toil, loneliness and privations, but they had their home and they were independent. It was this knowledge that kept her and Neil facing their almost unsurmountable difficulties. It was the glorious consciousness of independence that supported Mary in all her new hardships.

She had never owned anything in her life before. As a dependent in her uncle's house before her marriage her strong spirit had been in constant rebellion against the very food she ate. No hardship could take away the joyous sense of liberty in this her own home. She breathed it in with the hundred scents of the forest and the new-turned sod. The sight of the slowly widening ring of trees was to her like the spreading of his wings to an eagle long imprisoned. Every felled tree, every charred stump, every hill of potatoes or stalk of stately Indian corn was a new conquest. As she looked out daily from her spinning-wheel at her husband and son compelling the earth to give them their bread she was filled with a perfect sense of well-being. And every night as she stretched her aching limbs upon her rough, straw bed it was with prayers of fervent gratitude that the roof that covered them was their own.

In these last three years she had seen the face

of another woman but once. It was that first terrible winter when she had plumbed the depths of sorrow. The little golden head of the baby flower had drooped sadly after its rough transplanting to the new soil. Little Ailison had never rallied after that long terrible journey from the Portage, and that first winter there was no cow and no milk. And so Neil had journeyed out to ask Betsy's advice, and Betsy had come to her across the bleak miles of winter swamp. But all Betsy's skill availed nothing and before she returned to her own family they buried the little form in the centre of the clearing and put a little brush fence around her.

Jane Ann had sent some flower-seeds in with Betsy, and in the spring Mary and her boy sowed Scottish blue bells over the little mound. Three times they had bloomed, like a patch of the sky fallen into the clearing, and three times the little mound had been buried in a flood of crimson maple leaves, and the mother had toiled on without complaint.

The next spring Hector had brought a cow and a half-grown calf around the Barrier, as Mary had named the Osborne estate that cut them off from their fellows. They had milk for Allister now, and plenty of butter, and the calf had grown and was trained to the yoke. The land gave them abundant food, potatoes and Indian corn, beside vegetables, and wheat as well as winter feed for their stock. They had as yet tasted no mill flour. Their bread was made from the coarse meal which

Neil produced by pounding the wheat in a hollow stump.

Neil had declared he would bring her a small sack of real flour on his back this time. But he had not made the excursion out to the settlement for bread alone. Now that Allister was grown out of childhood his mother was tormented with fears that he might not get any schooling. Hector was also disturbed by the sight of all the young MacAllisters growing up like fire-weed in every clearing with neither church nor school to guide them. Two years before, at Mary's importunities he and his brother Peter had journeyed all the way to the Portage on foot to beg of Captain Osborne the boon of a school for the children of the two settlements.

They had not been able to make it quite plain to the great man who ruled Waubauskene county just why they wanted a school. It was the Captain's fixed opinion that these peasant folk, such as the MacAllisters, were here to clear the forests and till the land, and why they should want to add to their already heavy burdens the expenses of a school he could not understand. He had been very gracious, however, and patient, as one dealing with children demanding a useless toy, and he gave a vague promise of taking the matter to headquarters the next time he visited the Capital.

The MacAllisters were discouraged but not so the little woman in the far clearing. "Tell him we have a teacher all ready," she cried when Hector made his next annual visit. Neil would teach the school while she would help in teaching the

girls. They would go over and live in the school-house during the winter and come back in the spring when the school closed and work their land. She laid great plans all that winter as she sewed and spun and made soap and candles. Her bounding ambition cut roads out to the other settlement, built schools and made great men and women of all the MacAllisters' sons and daughters, and a Governor for Upper Canada of her own son.

So Neil had made his journey out to the settlement with a twofold purpose and Mary was waiting his return with high hopes. She paused at intervals as she moulded her butter and listened. She had churned late for Neil loved freshly-churned butter, made the old country way, without salt. She had no churn, but a wooden pail and a smooth paddle and she placed the small crock of butter on the cold shelf in the corner with some pride.

Allister had gone out early to the milking for they must be all through with their chores when the father returned. He came whistling up from the byre now, the pail foaming over the top, the dog bounding ahead of him, the cat leaping behind with pleading mews. He was a tall, handsome lad, with his father's dark eyes and his mother's black curly hair. His mother watched him come up the rough, icy path her eyes alight with pride and hope.

"Oh, Mother, I thought he'd be here long before this!" he cried.

"He'll be here soon, I don't doubt," she said again assuming the listening attitude.

As she strained and put away the milk the boy deftly set the table for supper. She dared not chide him when she saw he placed three tin plates on the bare, pine table. She had taught him to do all the household tasks that he might be able to care for things should her strength fail. He wanted to wait till his father came but she knew his boy's appetite and poured out the pease brose and milk for his supper.

When it was over and he had not yet come she went to her spinning wheel. Hector had brought it across the swamp on his back. She held the thread in her hand and sent the wheel whirring with the other, walking back and forth. Many a mile her moccasined feet had travelled in the winter evenings since they had got their two sheep across the swamp. She calculated with satisfaction how far she and the boy had got on with the spring work against Neil's return. She had made her soap much earlier than usual. The sugar-making had been started, too. The sap had been running for two days and Allister had been out with his dog all morning gathering the sap into the big trough.

He was running in and out now bringing in wood for the night and the morning's fire. The last rays of daylight could scarcely filter through the little window and she dreaded to light a candle. It was an admission that night had come and he was not yet here.

"When do you think my father will be here, Mother?" Allister asked each time he came in with an armful of wood. She had been hiding her

anxiety from him all afternoon but it was growing more difficult each moment.

"We must not waste time in idle watching, my son," she said sternly. "Get out your books and see what you can learn before he comes."

With his father's help Allister had made a calendar of birchbark, marking the dates with his home-made quill pen and red-maple ink. He had made a red mark with the juice of the blood-root round the day of his father's departure, and every evening when his work was done and it was time for lessons he made a little ceremony of marking off the day with charcoal, and saying, "Good-bye. I'm glad you're gone!"

He took it down from the log wall now and marked off the day with a flourish. "Good-bye, and I'm gladder you're gone than all the rest because you're the last!"

She smiled at his nonsense. She often looked at him playing with the dog or teasing the cat and wondered and was thankful that he was so gay and light of heart brought up as he was in loneliness.

Neil had brought many of his old school books from the home land, and though some real necessities had to be left behind to allow of their being brought across the Barrier Mary had insisted upon their coming, and no amount of toil had ever been allowed to interfere with the boy's lessons. He went over to the little shelf where they lay and reached down Green's History of the English People. She noticed that instead of taking it to the fire he went and sat by the little window. He

was generally lost to all the world around him in the printed page, but to-night she noticed that his eye often strayed to the one pane of the window.

She dared not let her own hands be idle for a moment and as she walked up and down before her wheel she speculated. Perhaps he had been delayed a day longer in leaving than he had expected. But he had said nothing would keep him beyond the tenth, and now it was the twelfth.

The boy gave a shout, and she dropped her yarn with a leap of her heart.

"Your father?" she whispered. But it was only some of the lad's nonsense. He had spied a rabbit scuttling across the corner of the clearing, a very funny rabbit . . .

"Tut, tut," she said, "Be wise, Allister. To your book." But she suspended her work for a moment and the boy did not see that she had turned very white.

The little, stumpy clearing that had shown rose and golden for a while had deepened to an intense blue. A little, silver wisp of a moon rode above the sharp tops of the tall hemlocks. There was no use pretending that the day had not gone. The boy rose at her bidding and lit the candle. His mother put aside her wheel and taking her sewing placed the candle in the window and sat down by it. The boy took his book to the fireside and sat on the hearth-stone beside his dog. She could see that he was listening instead of studying but she could not chide him.

"What's that, Mother?" he asked at the sound of an icicle falling from the roof.

"Watch Rover," she said. "He will know long before either you or I when his master is coming."

Allister turned and regarded his pet solemnly. It had been the greatest day of his life he believed when Uncle Hector came across the swamp with a soft bundle for him in either coat pocket, a kitten in one and a puppy in the other. Hector had objected strongly to taking any such troublesome cargo on such a journey, but Jane Ann had insisted that no boy could be brought up without a dog and Neil would need one anyway and Mary would need the cat. Allister had a mild liking for the cat, but he and his dog were like very brothers.

There was silence in the little shanty except for the crackling of the fire. They were both listening intently to every sound from without.

The firelight danced across the bare floor and lit up the dark corners of the shanty. It played on the fringes of dried corn and the sacks of precious seed hanging from the low, dark rafters. Neil had made all the furniture himself, the table, the long bench, and the two stools, the tall cupboard with its many shelves opposite the fireplace, and the low bed in the corner with its bulging straw tick, covered with one of Jane Ann's brightest patch-work quilts.

The firelight lit up the boy's dark face as he sat, his head up, in an attitude of listening. She watched the quick lift of his head, the flash of his eye, and smiled remembering what Hector had said on his last visit.

"It'll be no easy task making that colt of yours step in harness, Neil," he had warned.

Mary's heart had thrilled at the prophecy. Her son would be a strong man. She was a strong woman. That was one of the reasons she had been attracted so irresistibly to one so gentle and quiet as Neil.

She had been reared in a different environment from her husband. The uncle and aunt who had brought her up did not possess wealth but they moved among folk of some education and culture and had given their orphan niece many advantages. But she was neither beautiful nor talented and her life of dependence upon grudging relatives was often well-nigh unendurable to her high spirits.

And then the drabness of her lonely life had suddenly burst into splendor. There were Caledonian Games in the village, and the important folk of the place had danced with the commoners. There was a tall, young Highlander there, with dark, dreamy eyes and a gentle smile, who danced with Mary. He was only the young Dominie from a little school up the glen, but, in his bright kilt and plaid, he carried all the romance and glamour of Prince Charlie. No wonder he danced away with Mary Murray's lonely heart, and no wonder she left everything and went with him to his little Highland glen. Her elders disowned her promptly but she had never looked back, even in thought. Not all the hardships of those first years in Scotland, nor the privations and the heavy toil of this their new life, not even the little mound in the

centre of the clearing where half her heart had been buried had caused the least shadow to fall upon the glamour of their great love. It had all been more than worth while.

Their boy was rolling over restlessly on the hearth. His bright face was clouded. She came to his rescue and her own.

"Where did we leave off in *Rob Roy*?" she asked. He sat up eagerly.

Oh would she tell the rest? She had stopped just where Francis Osbaldistone and Diana had met out hunting. What did they say? Would she tell another chapter?

She had told him the story of many a volume of her girlhood reading, as well as much she remembered of Greek and Roman history. His father was his tutor and his mother was his library and so in spite of the lack of books and schools he was really better informed than many a lad of his age who had spent all his days in school.

It was a great story, he said, drawing a long breath when she had finished. Wouldn't she love to see the Old Country again? She had never allowed his memory of his first home to die out and the talk drifted to those old days, in the heather hills, the wild, little loch, the misty mountains and the piper coming down the glen with his pibroch.

"Hey, I'd like to be a piper!" he cried. "I will some day."

"Tut, tut," she said. "A piper! The pipes are just for holiday times. You must have bigger work than that to do."

He considered that. "Well, perhaps I'll go to the Portage and work. I'd like to work with Mr. Hardy. I could work in his mill and learn to make flour."

"But you wouldn't leave the home here we have all worked so hard to make?"

"I could do both. Uncle Hector says that Captain Osborne has three farms going all at once, and so has Squire Hadding."

"Do you remember the little Hadding girl to whom you gave your pink alley?"

He laughed. He had long since ceased to mourn the loss of his treasure. The memory of the little girl who had wanted Ailison was growing dim.

"Mother," he whispered.

"Yes?" she asked, her heart anxious. He always whispered when he mentioned the little sister whose loss had been so grievous.

"That little Hadding girl wanted to have our baby, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps if we had let her have her she might have been alive yet?"

There was no answer, and he knew instinctively that he must not say more. He longed to talk about the little sister, but had always found that neither his father nor his mother were able to join him. There were a great many things he wanted to ask about her. She was in Heaven and very happy, both Aunt Betsy and his mother had assured him of that, but he wanted to know what the place was like and who would care for the baby if she cried for her mother.

"Perhaps," his mother said, with a heavy sinking of her heart, "you had better be getting away to your bed, my laddie."

Allister sat up in alarm. How could he go to bed with his father coming home to-night? Why, he might whistle at the edge of the clearing any minute. "Let me take a torch and go down and see if he's coming?" he pleaded.

"Such foolishness," she said, sewing rapidly "What good would that do anyone? You would get lost yourself."

He laughed at that. He and Rover get lost in the bush! Why, he knew every tree for miles around. She could not deny that but she did not reply for again she was listening.

She could not suggest that they close up the shanty and prepare for the night. Other nights they had drawn in the leather string of the latch and placed the great bar across the door. For there was often the sound of a wolf-howl in the surrounding blackness, and one night a howling pack had even burst across a corner of the clearing and were scattered by a shot from Neil's gun. But to-night he might even now be coming out of the bush and he must not find his door barred.

There was a longer silence than usual from the hearth, and looking across she saw the boy rolled over with his head on the dog, stretched out in the dead weary sleep of boyhood. His mother drew a breath of relief. It had been almost impossible to hide her consuming anxiety from him any longer. She took a homespun blanket from the bed and spread it over him. Now that he was

not watching her she could not sit. She lighted a pine torch at the fire and put her shawl over her head. Rover half rose to accompany her but she whispered a command to lie down, and slipped out. She had no idea why she was going but she must do something.

The March wind had fallen and the clearing was breathless and very cold. That was good. The frost would keep the paths through the swamp safe supposing Neil had come that way. And he was just the sort to risk it, the gallant, feckless lad that he was. She was possessed with a certainty that he was somewhere on the road, and felt drawn irresistibly down the path that led to the edge of the clearing. Pulling her shawl closer and holding her flaming torch high she began to hurry down the rough path that Allister had been keeping open against his father's coming. She paused suddenly realizing her foolishness. If Neil were indeed out there in that black void how could she hope to find him? He might even now be nearing home from the other direction. But something rose up within her and declared that he was there out beyond that towering black wall that hemmed her in. She stood looking out towards it helpless, assailed by terrors. He might have been treed by wolves. He might have roused a mother-bear. He might have broken through the ice in one of the bottomless pools of the swamp. The yowl of a wild-cat came out of the black depths and she shivered.

Suddenly the shanty door was flung open and

the boy and the dog tumbled forth and brought back the necessity for self-command.

"Mother," he shouted, "Mother, where are you?"

"Get on your cap, Allister," she called calmly. "The night frost is keen."

He was at her side in a moment pulling his knitted cap over his tousled head. He peered anxiously at her in the light of the torch. "Mother, where have you been? Would you. . . . You wouldn't be thinking that my father is lost?" he whispered.

"I-I don't know, Allister my boy." It was impossible to keep her fear from him longer. "I hope not."

"Let me go out to the pine tree on the little creek and call to him," he cried eagerly. "That's the way they got Uncle Jimmie's Archie out of the bush when he was lost, Mother, don't you remember? Uncle Hector told me. Uncle Jimmie climbed a tree and called and called."

A light leaped into Mary's eyes. "They called Geordie Red, too, when we were at Aunt Jane Ann's," she said breathlessly, "when he was lost hunting a cow."

"Eh, yes Mother! Old Wully Fraser got the trumpet his cousin had at Waterloo, and he blew it and Geordie Red heard it. They blew it all night. I remember! And I can yell as loud as that, Mother. Listen!"

He uttered a resounding whoop like an Indian on the warpath, a yell that set all the echoes of the lone blackness ringing. "I'll climb that big

tree at the little creek, Mother! I was up it last week when we tapped the trees. I was away up, miles above the bush." . . .

She kindled to his eagerness. Her face was drawn, her eyes burning. "No, no. The clearing is on higher ground. We are above the swamp. We'll climb to the roof. That will be a higher point than your tree!"

"I'll get the ladder from the byre," the boy cried and was off in the darkness the dog at his heels. His mother followed, the torch flaring over her shoulder. She had never got over her early fear of the forest at night. It was but a few rods from the house to the rude shanty that served as a shelter for their small stock, but as they approached they heard the lowings of the cow. Rover suddenly stopped and bristled shaking with fierce growlings. Allister gave a terrific yell and a dark form shot out from behind the low strawstack and made off across the clearing; a lone prowling wolf, attracted by the scent of the animals. Rover gave chase, at a safe distance, raising a storm of echoes from his furious barking.

They dragged the ladder across the snow and placed it against the roof of the shanty. The boy scrambled up, the mother followed, while Rover stood with his paws on the first rung and whined. Great icicles depended from the eaves and had to be broken off. The rough, basswood troughs that composed the roof gave but a slippery foothold, but their moccasined feet held. They scrambled over the slippery surface to the highest point of the roof and seating themselves faced the part of the

Barrier where the blazed trail led into its depths.

Together they gave a long, loud halloo. They called and listened, called and listened, hearing only the weird echo of their own voices flung back from the black void. But as they called, gradually any doubts of the necessity of their task vanished from Mary's mind. She became possessed with the certainty that Neil was out there in the wilderness with nothing to guide him but her voice and she grew stronger at each call.

As the conviction deepened she realized the necessity of conserving their strength for the night's work.

"We may have to call a long time, Allister, my son," she said. She spoke calmly and his fears were allayed. "So we must take turns. Away down with you for a little." For she had noticed that his changing boy's voice was becoming a weak falsetto.

He was falling over with weariness but she could see that to send him to rest was not wise. Again and again she begged, but she did not command. She dared not shame the growing manhood in him. No, she must go and rest for a little and get warmed at the fire, he declared stubbornly. She was possessed of a feeling of boundless strength, she could never feel weariness so long as Neil was out there. But she took pity on the boy's weakening voice and went down the ladder. She would rest she said and then she would take her turn.

But she could not rest. She mended the fire and warmed her chilled hands and feet. And she put

a fresh candle in the window beside the one that was not yet burned out—a reckless extravagance. And always she was listening intently after every call from the hoarse, young voice above.

She went out and up the ladder again. "I feel rested now, Sandy," she said, using the baby name she sometimes still gave him when he had acquitted himself especially well. "We must save each other and take turns. Away down with you now and rest and eat a piece, and I'll call you soon."

"You're sure you'll call me, Mother?"

"Yes, yes, sure."

"In how long?"

"Very soon. I'll call you. I promise."

She never had broken a promise to him, and he prepared to descend.

"Mother," he said faltering at the head of the ladder, "You don't think. . . . You're not afraid that my father" . . . His voice choked. Her face was twisted with anguish, but he could not see it and her voice was steady.

"We will trust in the Lord, Allister, my son. Say a prayer for your father before you rest and take a good sleep."

He slipped down, manfully holding back his tears, and was welcomed joyfully by Rover. He was fairly staggering from grief and weariness but before he curled up beside the dog he knelt on the hearthstone and besought the Lord to bring his father home. He fell over beside Rover immediately, but even in his deep sleep he seemed to hear his mother's long, anguished call floating out

on the night; a sound he was to hear in his dreams all his future life.

Mary felt no weariness. For an hour she stood erect on the slippery roof her face turned to the quiet, grey, star-lit skies and sent out her call, louder, stronger, and clearer each time. But she would not break her promise to her boy, and though she dreaded the inaction she descended and awoke him. When his hoarse boy's voice was sounding from above she made herself a drink of strong peppermint tea, left a cup of milk and a bannock on the table for him, and waited impatiently till she could reasonably take her turn again.

It was far on in the night, that heavy, still hour of blackness that descends before the first grey hint of dawn, and she was on the roof again still giving forth her stirring halloos, when she thought she detected a faint sound in the empty blackness. She had been listening so long and so intently she feared her very anxiety had conjured it. She called again, louder and stronger, and held her breath. No sound this time. It had probably been the cry of a wildcat or some small forest-creature done to death. Again she shouted, stronger and clearer yet, because of the tiny thrill of hope. Still no answer, only the breathless stillness and blackness that had remained so unresponsive all the night. The little moon had long ago disappeared behind the black wall of the pines; the clearing was a ghostly island in a sea of darkness and she a lost soul trying to summon another lost soul out of the vast emptiness. So it

seemed to her as, despairingly, she shouted yet again, a far-reaching anguished cry. And there it was again! That same faint, sharp sound!

She leaped to her feet, and putting all her strength into her voice she sent her husband's name ringing far down the dark aisles, "Neil! Neil!"

Another moment of breathless waiting, heart-beat suspended. And there it was! There could be no doubt this time. It was a human cry. God be thanked! She slid down the ladder and burst in upon the sleeping boy.

"Allister, Allister!" she shouted hoarsely, "your father is calling from the swamp!"

The boy staggered stupidly to his feet. "A light!" she commanded, "A bundle of torches!" She darted to the cupboard and took down a small bottle and slipped it into the bosom of her dress, a roll of bandages from the kist in the corner—they might be needed—and she was ready. Allister ran out ahead of her, the dog bounding about him. "Rover'll find him, Mother! Rover'll lead us!" he shouted back.

"Wait, lad!" she called when they were half way to the edge of the clearing, "Quiet, Rover!" They stood motionless and she gave one more call, the boy joining his wild excited note to hers. And as they held their breath the answer came. Allister gave a shout. It was south of the trail, he cried as he dashed forward, away south!

His mother followed him. He was a marvel at following sounds and knew his way about in the

forest as she did about the clearing. With Rover and him they could not go astray.

They plunged into the blackness of the swamp following the dog, shouting and calling and waving their torches. All Mary's fear of wolves and bears and wildcats was completely gone. And indeed the noise of the boy and the dog, and the waving lights would have scared the boldest wolf pack. But the Barrier swamp was a fearsome place to enter at night. Giant pines rose to a tremendous height, and between the great, bare trunks was a mad tangle of fallen timbers and undergrowth. A wild confusion of bare roots torn from the soft soil in the fall of great trees seemed to writhe in frightful contortions. In the summer all this wild mass of decaying timbers and springing underbrush was interspersed with pools of water, covered with a tangle of green growth, the home of myriad wriggling snakes and turtles. But now the place was a uniform ghostly grey between the black trunks and roots. The pools were frozen still, and the night's frost had spread a smooth crust over the soft snow that bore the little rescue party up as they plunged deeper and deeper into the maze.

Day had broken over the lone clearing, and the long shadows of the pines were drawing away from the shanty door when the rescuers staggered out of the forest, half-carrying, half-dragging an exhausted man. Mary tore off his frozen clothing and put him to bed with a hot stone at his feet and all the blankets and quilts the shanty held piled upon him. When he had had a hot drink and a little sleep he tried to tell his story.

He had left the settlement two days before, and because the frost was hard he had taken the trail across the Barrier. But late in the afternoon he had come to a place where the ice was melted, and he had to journey round it. When he reached the other side he could not locate the blazed trees, though he hunted for them till dark. He made a fire and waited all night, but the next morning he still could not locate the trail. His food was soon all gone and he did not see anything to shoot. About noon he slipped off a log and sprained his ankle so that he could scarcely walk. He wandered about trying to get his direction by the sun, but the second night came down upon him. He had not dared stop, so he lit a torch and stumbled on. His foot was so sore that part of the time he had to crawl on his hands and knees, that was how his mittens were so torn and his hands bleeding. And then, when he had almost given up hope, he thought he heard a faint call. It seemed to come from exactly the opposite direction from that in which he was going. He listened, and when it came again and again, even so faint he could hardly detect it, he knew what it was, and turned and followed it. He tried to answer from the first, but his voice was too faint and hoarse. But all night he crawled along following the call and it had led him home!

He told his story in little bits for he was exhausted, and Mary bade him be silent as she gave him sips of warm milk. But he whispered every time she came to the bedside. "You called me, Mary. You called me home."

He repeated the wonder again and again between his fitful slumbers and in the delirium that came upon him. For three days and nights, staggering with weariness and loss of sleep, Mary hung over him. He was now shivering with a chill she could not combat, now in a raging fever. She knew on the third night that he was sinking, but body and brain had grown so numb that she could not realize what it meant.

Allister had been by her side all night, but as morning approached he had dropped asleep for a moment at the table, his curly head fallen over on his arms. She looked at the little glass pane of the window and saw it had grown softly luminous. The sick man lay breathing heavily. He stirred, and Mary arose mechanically and fetched a fresh poultice from the fire. He stared up at her.

"Mary," he said in a stronger voice, "You called me." She thought he was only voicing the wonder of his rescue.

"Yes, Neil," she said softly as she changed the poultice. "We called you, Sandy and I. Try to sleep now, dear."

"But you called me," he persisted. "You called me just now, Mary."

"No, Neil, I did not call you just now. Sleep now, that's the lad."

She tucked the blankets closer about his neck and took the cold poultice back to the fire. She returned uneasily to the bed. The pale light of the candle fell directly upon his face, and she knew the truth. He had been right. Someone had called him—called him away.

For a moment she stood, dazed. Then some sense of her terrible desolation swept over her like a flood of waters. For a moment she lost her reason. She flung open the shanty door and ran out into the grey morning, plunging through the hard-crusts snow, calling for Jane Ann, for Hector—to come to her, and crying out against the black Barrier of forest that hemmed her in and against God who had forsaken her.

From the lighted door of the shanty the boy burst out and ran to her in terror. The fear in his eyes brought her back to sanity. She must not let him lose his reason, too. She put her arms about him and held him close. He was so young, she must not let this black flood engulf him, she must not. She held him to her till he grew calm and then, soothing him, she quietly led him back to the empty home.

CHAPTER IV.

ALLISTER MACALLISTER

ALLISTER MACALLISTER burst from the blue shadows of the forest and came like a storm across the clearing. It was a bitter March night with a biting wind lashing the moaning pine tops, but a hint of spring shone in the glow of the fiery sunset beyond the purple rim of the forest, and a crow had cawed from those very pine tops that morning. As the tall, strong youth raced with the wind across the snowy crust of the clearing the sight of two distant figures running laboriously up the rough forest trail made him burst into a yell of triumph. He had taken the path across the swamp, racing home from school with his two cousins, the prize being exemption from all chores at the stable that night. He waved his cap and whooped as he ran.

The shanty where Johnny and Jane Ann MacAllister sheltered their family was half buried in the snows of the past winter, as though the little home was crouching close to mother earth in fear lest the winter's storms tear it from its foundations. Allister slipped and floundered up the icy path, jerked the leather thong that lifted the latch and burst into the warm shanty. The three younger children by the fire gave shouts of wel-

come, the two dogs leaped from the fireside barking joyously, and the older girls screamed upon him to shut the door.

But Allister had bumped his curly head against the low lintel of the door and he stopped in his headlong course and stood staring up at it.

"Losh! Look at that, Aunt Jenann," he shouted indignantly, "I'm the tallest man in this house and you're making me go to school!"

The chill air rushed into the shanty turning the stifling atmosphere into clouds of steam.

"Shut the door, ye rascal! Do ye want to freeze us all to death?" screamed Jane Ann from her corner beyond the fire-place where she marched to and fro before her large spinning wheel. He slammed the door with a loud bang, its frosty boards resounding.

O, sic a wife as Wully had,
Ah wadna gie a button for her!

he roared musically.

Effie, Jane Ann's eldest girl, was setting the heavy, delft plates on the bare, pine table for supper. Allister flung his snow-laden cap at her and his wet mittens he threw at the other girl who was churning in a corner of the room. The three youngest children left their bench by the fireside.

"Tell us about the school, Sandy."

"Was the Master awful cross?"

"Did Little Johnny and Hughie get kept in?"

He warded them off by pelting them with pieces of half-melted ice from his rough socks. He snatched one of the great slices of bread Effie had

been cutting for supper and crammed half of it into his mouth. Munching happily he proceeded to measure himself on the door-post where he and Jane Ann's seven had been in the habit of stretching themselves like young bears ever since he had made his home within its hospitable frame.

He caught up a butcher knife from the table and placing his straight, slim length against the door frame, cut a gash in the wood where the top-most black curl of his head reached.

"Horo!" he shouted. Yes, he was quite as tall as Little Johnny, and Little Johnny was eighteen while Allister was only seventeen. He would just have to show Uncle Hector what an unseemly thing it was for a man of his stature to be attending school with children.

Effie was looking round hurriedly for the lost knife. She was a tall, stooped girl, anxious-eyed from the care of many younger brothers and sisters. She pounced angrily upon the culprit.

"Sandy! I might have known! And me hunting the place for that knife. Get away with ye!"

He held the knife high above her reach, dancing backwards, while she followed, vainly snatching and scolding.

"There's never a minute's peace in this house after you get home," she screamed, "Give me that knife I tell you!"

He jumped aside and caught up the boot-jack from the corner. Putting it under his chin as a fiddle and using the knife as a bow, he dashed off an imaginary tune, leaping hither and thither out of her reach, and shouting to everyone to look

how well Effie could dance. Man, but couldn't she jump? There wasn't a rabbit in the bush could beat her! All to the shrieking delight of the youngsters.

"Mother, come to Sandy!" beseeched the girl, in tears of exasperation.

Jane Ann, intent on the great march of the spinner, a stout figure in a short home-spun dress and blue checked apron, paid no attention. During the years, since Neil's orphaned boy had come to add his large contribution to the disturbances that often threatened to rock the shanty, she had increasingly found it necessary to quell the racket by creating a greater one, but unless matters got entirely out of hand, she generally let well enough alone, trusting to the entrance of her silent husband to produce a lull.

At the sight of Effie's angry tears, Allister stuck the knife into the door-post, dagger-like, and turned his attention to the laughing girl at the churn. It was a very late hour to be churning, with the pease-brose for supper bubbling over the fire, but even the butter it seemed, took on the lax and easy nature of the household, so Annie churned away in placid indifference and enjoyed the fun. She was a pleasant, youthful copy of her mother, pink cheeks, laughing eyes and fair hair that was always awry.

Allister pulled a strand of it and when she reached to slap him, he caught her up under one arm, and ran round the room with her, asking gravely if anyone would like to buy a bag of potatoes. They were not very good potatoes, he con-

fessed solemnly, having altogether too many eyes, But he would sell them very cheap to the first bidder. "Taties! Taties! Who wants cheap taties?" The children shouted with glee and even Jane Ann had to smile. At last his shrieking, struggling burden managed to reach up and grab a handful of his curly hair and ended the struggle.

"Aw, you daft loon!" she gasped in outraged dignity, pulling her disordered dress down into decency again. "Here now! Don't stand gawkin' there! If you want something to keep you quiet, try this churn. "I'm dead tired, and the cream jist won't break."

Allister seized the dasher and worked it furiously. That was like Sandy, she reflected in satisfaction. There was no living with him in the house he was such a torment. But he was always ready to help if you let on you were tired or looked as if you were going to cry. Then, too, he would do things the other boys would not stoop to for his mother had trained him to help with women's work.

The door burst open the second time and Little Johnny and Hughie slid into the room, gasping. With what breath they had left they jeered loudly at the churning, calling him "Big Kirsty," the tall, raw-boned mother of the Wild McNabbs, who lived in a remote clearing to the north. Allister gave blow for blow. Why! had they come home at last? They were so long that everyone had been wearying for them. Effie had been crying for fear a bear had eaten them. Where had they been

sleeping? He could get home faster on his hands and knees.

"You'd better get out and do the chores, seeing you're that smart," Hughie cried, taking half a slice of bread in one tremendous mouthful.

Allister scoffed loudly. The chores! Had they forgotten about the race? But of course they couldn't be expected to remember anything so long.

Hughie was inclined to argue that the race had not been fair when little Jeannie, looking through the small, low window, announced shrilly that the ox sleigh was coming up the road from the bush. The two late-comers suddenly dropped their argument and fled to the stable.

But Allister was not going to do the churning for Annie without getting some entertainment from her.

"Mercy, Annie!" he cried, "Listen to this churn! It's singing. Do you not hear it?"

Keeping time with the dasher he sang a sputtering, rumbling ditty in perfect accord with the churn's music. The burden of the churn's song was its poor opinion of Annie. It considered her an idle and foolish lass that left him with nothing to do all morning, and worked him hard at the wrong end of the day. It ended its lugubrious dirge with a hopeful strain, however. It would not have to put up with her for very long. For it had been told that very soon she was going to move away north to wallop and worry a poor churn that lived in the Wild McNabb settlement:

And there she'll learn
To do her turn,
And grin and girn
At Black Duncan's churn.

When the song ended with a satisfied gurgle, even the victim gave way to laughter. For the butter had come and she could afford to be in a good humor.

Allister looked round for someone else to torment. Little four-year-old Maggie, in a clean pinny, her curls wet and newly combed, was sitting on her little stool by the fire gazing in solemn amazement at the wonderful churn that had learned to sing. Jimmie, who was six, was staring, too, but with a hopeful twinkle in his eyes. He did not always understand what Sandy was up to but knew it was something funny.

The fire had burned down to a great bed of glowing coals and the Dutch Oven was placed at the side with the scones baking in it for supper. On top of it sat the big, black, iron tea-kettle, and it was acting very strangely, rocking back and forth and emitting angry spurts of water.

"Hey, Maggie!" whispered the tormentor, "What's the matter with the tea-kettle? Losh, I'm scairt! It must be bewitched!"

Little Maggie slipped from her stool, and backed away, her hands clutching her small, homespun skirts. Jimmie followed her more slowly. The one pale curl that ran along the top of his head had just been brushed up by Effie and seemed to be standing erect in apprehension. He tried to giggle, but was not quite sure whether Sandy might be serious this time.

Sandy tip-toed to the kettle and listened, his face expressive of lively terror.

"Mercy on us! D'ye hear what its saying? It's found out what you two did yesterday." He wagged his head ominously. "Land sakes! It's singing about it, too!"

He leaned close to the kettle in a listening attitude and sang in a high, thin voice and in perfect time to the kettle's dance a sputtering song to the tune of *Tullochgorum*.

O, Jim and Mag's a wicked pair,
Jim and Maggie, Jim and Maggie,
I'll scaud them well if they don't take care,
Spit and scaud them, spit and scaud them!

Little Jimmie's eyes were dancing but small Maggie's round, pink face drew up in a frightened pucker.

Jeannie, the eight-year-old tell-tale of the family, cried out, "Mother, Sandy's teasin' the baby."

The baby burst into a roar at this sign of sympathy and Jane Ann shouted at the mischief-maker above the whirring of her wheel.

"Away to yer books, Sandy, before I give ye a clout over the head!"

Allister made a dive at the tell-tale that sent her flying beneath the table for refuge. He went slowly to the little shelf in the cold corner where his books were piled, though he was not in the least afraid that Aunt Jane Ann would carry out her threat. The whole household recognized that the adopted son could take liberties with both parents that their own flesh and blood did not dare. Jane Ann scolded and slapped her own

brood whenever she could reach them, but though she often raised her hand to this most troublesome member of the family it never descended.

"He's a motherless bairn," she always said in extenuation. Aunt Teenie, who ruled her own household and all the settlement with a strong hand, declared that Jane Ann was too easy with him, and Johnny just no use at all. Aunt Minnie, Hector's wife, who was privately relieved that the boy had not been put under her care at his mother's death, grieved that Jane Ann and Johnny were letting the lad grow up in a Godless fashion, with nothing but nonsense in his head. Jane Ann's retort to this was that they should all be thankful that there was some fun left in him; many a lad would be melancholy for the rest of his life after all he had been through. And to this the sternest Aunt had no reply.

For in spite of the tragedies that had beset his boyhood, Allister had grown up to the edge of manhood having lost little of his natural gaiety, largely due to Jane Ann's warm mother-heart. Mary MacAllister knew what she was doing when she asked Hector to be a father to her boy when she was gone, but left him for Jane Ann to be his mother.

He had not come through his losses quite unscathed, and Jane Ann knew it, and saw when a shadow would fall unheralded upon his gay spirits. Sometimes he would waken suddenly in his straw bed on the floor of the loft where the four boys sprawled in an irregular row, and lie listening to the melancholy notes of the wind

played on the strings of the dark forest. And he would live again that dread night of his childhood and the terrible days that followed, and the next day he was sure to try everyone's patience beyond endurance.

"He's been hearin' his mother calling," Jane Ann would say and shield him from punishment.

Jane Ann's strongest weapon was the boy's deep and abiding reverence for his Uncle Hector. Young as he was he never forgot that it was Uncle Hector who had rescued him and his mother in their desolation. After Neil had left the settlement on that last journey Hector had become possessed of the idea that something had gone wrong with his brother. He dreamed of Neil and Mary at night, troubled dreams, and in spite of all protests, and the spring work that called loudly, he took his gun and a sack of food and set out on the fifteen-mile walk around the Barrier. He had buried his brother in the clearing beside the little mound and had brought the two stranded, bereft creatures out through the trackless melting snow of the forest. He took them to Jane Ann, for it was on Jane Ann that Mary kept calling. The brothers rallied round her. They promised that when the harvest was all in they would build her a shanty on Hector's clearing where she could live till Allister was old enough to go back to his own land.

Mary was grateful and tried to enter into their plans, but when the Autumn had come with its reprieve from the tremendous toil of the short summer Hector said nothing of the promised

shanty. For it was plain to them all that Mary would never need it. She managed to hold on to life throughout the next winter for the sake of her boy. She turned Jane Ann's house into a school, and even on the days when she had to lie on the straw bed in the corner she taught the children and young folk their lessons. She was in dread lest her son grow up in ignorance, and was very stern with him if he neglected his lessons. "Learn, learn!" was her constant cry.

And all that winter while she taught the children she talked to the elders about a school.

"I must see a teacher in the settlement before I go, Hector," she whispered, as he sat by her bedside trying to read some comforting passages from the Bible, "I could go to Neil content if I saw you with a school."

"Och, hoch, indeed, ye'll not be talkin' that way," said Betsy coming to her with a bowl of oat-meal gruel, "Here, take this *m'eudail*, and ye'll be up and teachin' a school for us yourself."

"No, Betsy, I'll not teach another winter, but I must see a school for all our boys before I go."

She turned upon Hector. "If you had children of your own you would understand," she burst out.

Hector's two children had been committed to the deep on their long and terrible voyage across the Atlantic when the fever had taken such heavy toll of the immigrant passengers, a fact that Minnie's sisters-in-law tried to remember when she wearied them with her melancholy prophecies. Hector made no reply but he took

himself sternly to task. Had he been a faithless shepherd of the lambs of the flock? He went over with the problem the next night to Jimmie's clearing. Jimmie was his eldest brother and the husband of Teenie, and that energetic lady was almost as keen for a school as Mary was. The two men doubled up on a bench before Teenie's spotless hearth and smoked their beech leaf tobacco and wondered what could be done.

It was finally decided among the brothers and their relatives, the Red MacAllisters, that Hector and Jimmie should make one more journey to the Portage to petition the great man who was the virtual ruler of their little forest kingdom. They set off on foot through mountains of snow early in the new year. The long journey gave them time to consider their grievances and the many petitions they wished to lay before Captain Osborne.

For the MacAllister settlement still lacked the three great essentials of pioneer life. They needed a road by direct route to the Portage that they might take their wheat to the mill and have a market for their crops, for the Portage was only twenty miles away as the wild geese flew. Then they desired with all their hearts a school for their children, and most of all Hector yearned for a church and the preaching of the Gospel. The encircling estates of the gentry who lived at the Portage held all these privileges away from the isolated settlements to the north. The MacAllisters had swung their axes against all the obstacles they could reach, already each house-

holder could hear the sounds from his neighbor's clearing. But they could not cut down the Barrier as Mary had named the great estates that hemmed them in, so it was a pair of determined faces that were set towards the Portage that winter day.

Each with his gun and a heavy sack of grain on his back they journeyed east along the road up which Mary had driven so hopefully four years before. It was still but a choked trail through the forest and led to the English Block, the nearest settlement with its mill and its dirty tavern of ill repute. Twenty miles south next, through the Irish settlement where you had only to pull the string of a shanty door and you were made welcome to both bed and table. Then they turned westward, past what seemed to them the palatial residence of Squire Hadding at the Birches and on to the village at the Portage.

Captain Osborne was a fairly kind-hearted man who intended to rule his subjects well and give them what he considered the best for them. But his stern old Tory soul rose up in indignation at this thrice repeated request of these backwoods peasants from the MacAllister settlement. There was something in the demeanor of Hector MacAllister that kept the great man from telling him just how troublesome and childish his petitions were. As if the Government had money to hand out for schools in the backwoods! As if he, Osborne, could give them roads and mills and churches when he was desperate himself for money. But he did not say these things to Hector

MacAllister. There was something about the giant's great form and long flowing beard that Osborne confessed afterwards to his friend Hadding reminded him of Michael Angelo's "Moses." And here he was yet again, Moses-like, to demand of Pharaoh justice for his people, though Captain Osborne was not struck with that aspect of the picture.

"Why in Heaven's name do they want schools anyway?" he asked in irritation of Hadding after the two suppliants had gone away for the third time sullen and empty-handed. "A savage ignorant Dominie to thrash their youngsters such as they have here in the Portage!"

Squire Hadding, who had dropped in as the MacAllisters left, looked after the retreating figures meditatively. "I suppose it's a part of the ambition and enterprise that brought them out here, Wilfred," he said, after a long pull at his pipe.

Osborne frowned. This sounded as if Hadding had been listening to that scurrilous radical, Miles Hardy.

"They don't need schools," he argued reasonably from his ancient eminence. "These people are here to clear the forests, and work the land. There will always be plenty of cultured and educated people of our class to rule the country. It's all a mistake to worry them with reading and writing. 'Keep down the underbrush' is old Sir Howell's maxim, and it's a good one."

Hadding felt there was something wrong somewhere with his friend's reasoning. If the poor

beggars wanted a school why not let them have one. It might make them more contented and stand one in good stead at election time. But he made no reply. He always took the line of least resistance and Osborne's absolute monarchy was after all the simplest way of settling difficulties in this new land that bristled with difficulties, and was already proving such a bitter disappointment to them all.

Hector MacAllister left the Land Agent's office with a flame in his eyes and heart. They would have turned homeward at once but Mary had made them promise to see the Miller and his wife and give them once more her thanks for the open arms that had received her on her entry into the strange backwoods.

So, after a dinner of salt fish and potatoes at the King's Arms where the polite little tavern-keeper ran about with a very dirty sack tied round his thin waist and was scolded by his large commanding wife, the two men went down the winding, stumpy village street between the shanties to the mill beside the old log bridge that still spanned the Gala Water. The mill stood silent, for the river was still bound in the iron bands of winter, but the Miller was there. He was seated at a rough pine desk beside a small iron stove in a little room built on to the side of the mill. It was within the four walls of this room, Captain Osborne was convinced that most of the troubles that assailed him were hatched.

At the sight of two strangers approaching his door, Miles Hardy flung it open and bade them

enter. The MacAllisters? Of course he remembered them, and the day the four brothers came through and the trouble they had getting their land. And there was the younger brother who came later and the plucky Grandmother, and the brave little woman with the bonny bairns that followed alone. Man, wasn't she the gallant lass! There was a laddie with her and a wee bit thing with a red head—the wife had never stopped talking about it!

They sat down by the fire and Hector told in a few words the tragic story of the bright little head whose light had been so early blotted out, and all the tragedy that had befallen his brother's family.

Miles Hardy's deep set eyes with the shadow of tragedy in them blazed. "It's murder," he said, when the story was told. "The murder of a whole family!" The man who owns the land that shut your brother off from help killed the three of them!" He brought down his fist upon his floury desk with a bang that sent up a puff of white dust as though it were the smoke of battle.

"Privilege!" he shouted, "Privilege! It's the curse of this land! That man Osborne owns a thousand acres of the best soil in Upper Canada! And not a tree cut down on it in all these years! A whole township given over to one man who can't make any use of it, while the man with the axe, who could make a home for his family in a few years is driven back into the wilderness! And Osborne thought the settlers would all be running to be his tenants! He was to be the great Land Owner of the new world! I tell you the stuff that

is bred in the bone of the pioneers of this country is not the trash that serfs are made of!"

The silent MacAllisters sat straighter on their bench. Here was one man who understood. Hardy sat for a moment silent gazing through the dusty little window at the wide white stretch of the bleak, frozen lake. His eyes were deeply tragic, as though he foresaw the coming strife into which his country was so soon to be plunged. "This thing will never be righted till there is blood-shed!" he muttered.

And what had they come out for this time, he asked, when his wrath had quieted a little. A school? Again? "I'll wager you didn't get it," he burst forth. The blue evening shadows of the forest had begun to stretch across the lake before the story of the school had all been told. Hardy insisted that they stay for supper and the night and dragged them across the snowy yard to his comfortable log house shouting to his wife to put on two more plates.

The Hardy home was very grand in the eyes of the men from the bare shanties of the backwoods. There was an inner room with a stove, a bright rag carpet, curtains on the windows and pictures on the wall. There was a stove in the kitchen, too, a shining marvel, sending out waves of heat.

Hardy's wife was as young and buxom as the first time they had seen her, with her pink cheeks and her tightly crimped black hair. There were a half-dozen little Hardys, all round-eyed and pink-cheeked like their mother, and even to the

youngest they all seemed to join in welcoming the visitors. It was the way of the home by the Gala Water, the string of its latch was ever out for a traveller.

They turned homeward next morning in better spirits than they had thought possible. At least they had a friend at the Portage. But the little woman lying in the corner of Jane Ann's shanty fighting for her life, refused to accept defeat.

"The Lord helps those that help themselves," were the words with which she received the discouraging news. "We'll build a school ourselves," she cried, rising on her elbow. "If you build a school, Hector," she added with deep diplomacy, "you will have a place of worship on the Sabbath!"

The suggestion drove Hector to the task. It looked impossible at first but the Red MacAllisters came across the Crick and they made a great "bee." They had a new incentive now. The Gentry at the Portage declared they must not have a school? Red Sandy asked. The MacAllisters would teach the Gentry a thing or two!

So they gathered to this new task, men who had barely time to snatch from the forest the food and shelter for their families. They cut out a little clearing where Jimmie Black's land joined Jimmie Red's, and by coming in the morning before the stars began to pale, and working by the light of pine torches long after night-fall, they built the little school. It was a low building made of untrimmed logs, the spaces between "chinked" with mud from the Crick, a poor little shanty to

all outward appearances but it was the defiant MacAllister's citadel. They had conquered!

Before they were able to get a teacher for it, the little shanty was dedicated as a place of worship. There was no minister, of course, but there were three men in the settlement who had made themselves responsible for keeping alive in the midst of their desperate toil a remembrance of their God and the things that are eternal. And they made themselves responsible also for the Sabbath services. There was Hector MacAllister who owned a rare and precious book of Chalmers's sermons, and read one at each service; there was Long Willie Red, whose glorious tenor voice would have made him a fortune in some other sphere, he led the congregation in *Coleshill* and *Martyrdom* and the other psalm-tunes; and there was Dougald Red, who had as great a gift in prayer as his brother had in song.

And so a new life opened out for the MacAllister settlement. They met Sabbath by Sabbath at the little school-house and their loneliness and isolation disappeared. Sometimes the sermon lasted an hour, and Dougald Red's prayers were rarely shorter, but there was never any sign of restlessness from even the youngest worshipper on the rough log benches. A humble little service it was in a poor log shanty but through it the pioneers received weekly a glimpse of that which lay beyond the encompassing ring of heavy toil that bound them in, and their hearts were lifted up and strengthened.

And just before Mary slipped away the teacher

came. Old Wully Fraser and his brother Watty were relatives of the MacAllisters and lived in the settlement. They in turn had a cousin, newly arrived in the country and looking about for a lot. The Frasers represented this relative as vastly erudite. He could read Latin as fast as any ordinary man could talk, Watty declared, and he could figger all day without stopping. And as for writing; there wasn't a man in the city of Glasgow who could put such flourishes on paper. Watty had seen him make a bird in a nest without taking pen from paper.

And so the teacher came, and as though her work was done Mary slipped away one spring day when the first hepatica had opened its bud on the edge of the clearing.

"You'll be a mother to my boy, Jane Ann," she had said that afternoon, "You're the only one that will give him a mother's love. And Hector has promised to see to his schooling, and he'll see that his young feet do not stray. Send him to Hector when there's trouble."

"Tut, tut, Mary," Jane Ann scolded to keep back the tears, "You'll be stronger when the weather gets warmer, never fear."

"He won't grieve long," Mary went on unheeding, "Thank the Lord for giving him a merry heart. But he'll need a strong hand over him, Jane Ann, and Hector will see to that. Hector promised."

And now it was three years since the defiant little school had reared its head in the backwoods in spite of all tyranny, and Isaac McWhinnie,

with his spelling book in one hand and his tawse in the other, was still in charge. He was not such a bad teacher as backwoods teachers went. He was a bit fond of the bottle, to be sure, and a great whaler with the tawse, but the elder MacAllisters looked up to him with reverence and felt that he had been sent to them directly by Providence. Many of his pupils had they dared would have expressed another opinion, and Allister had given it as his private opinion to little Johnny that McWhinnie was of his father, the devil. Nevertheless they all learned the rudiments from him after a fashion.

Part of Jane Ann's duty to her foster son was the reporting of his progress to Hector, but the task had lately resolved itself into hiding his worst escapades from his guardian. So far he had always respected the promise to his mother that he would learn diligently, and all Jane Ann had to say was, "Away to your books, Sandy," to bring him to heel. But now he declared he knew all that old McWhinnie could teach him, and since his soul's companion, Little Johnny, was about to leave school, Jane Ann was in fear lest he do something desperate.

He picked up his ragged spelling book, and threw it down again. He could spell every word in it from cover to cover, even the tricky ones like "phthisis" which the Master loved to give.

Next he picked up his grammar and made a terrible grimace at it that set little Jim off in a spasm of giggles. The Master was strong on English spoken correctly, though his heavy Scot-

tish burr often puzzled his Highland pupils. He was not slow in discovering that there was one of his pupils who did not fall into the common errors of the backwoods vernacular, so when he caught him in an occasional lapse from good English he thrashed him soundly. Moreover he had decreed that this same pupil must know his grammar from cover to cover. To-morrow's lesson was on prepositions. Allister scowled at them. He could not find the smallest connection between speaking the English language correctly and the rules inside Linney's Grammar. Prepositions now! Who wanted to know them? He knew them anyway; the whole list of twenty and some more, "About, above, around, across, along." The Master had declared a week ago that they must know them all, so one evening Allister had set them to the old psalm tune of Bangor and taking a fork from the drawer had given a perfect imitation of Long Willie Red leading the psalm at the Sabbath services in the school-house.

But though the three boys had learned the prepositions in this pleasant if rather irregular fashion they decided on the way to school that if McWhinnie wasn't too sober in the afternoon they would see how many they could miss without putting him into a rage. So he threw down the grammar and took up the one book he had now that could hold him, his mother's volume of Shakespeare. Jane Ann looked at him troubled. This was not a school book, and her glimpses into it convinced her that there would be serious trouble if Hector or Minnie saw into it. There

were parts that she could make neither head nor tail of. It seemed to just be a book of long endless talk between folks that had no meaning at all, and often wasn't fit for decent folks to read. And likely there wasn't a word of truth in the whole of it. However, Mary had read it, and so had Neil, and they had given it to the boy so Jane Ann thought she surely might risk it. After all there were things in the Bible you did not talk about.

But even Henry IV. and Falstaff could not hold the reader to-night. How could he endure school when Little Johnny left? Uncle Johnny had said that morning as they cleaned out the byre that Little Johnny need not go any more after this week. And all the other big boys would be leaving: Young Sandy Red and Uncle Peter's boys, even Hughie who was only sixteen, and he would be left alone to go to school with a lot of girls and children! It was unbearable. He banged his Shakespeare back upon the shelf and came over to Jane Ann's corner. She was putting aside her wheel, for the daylight was almost gone and the men were coming in for supper.

"Aw, Aunt Jenann," he pleaded, "Won't you get Uncle Hector to let me stop school with Little Johnny?"

"Tut, tut, and what about the grand scholar you were to be?"

"I've learned everything the Master can teach me," he cried boastfully, "Yes I have so! He told me to-day he had taken me as far as he had gone in Latin himself."

"Your Uncle Hector will be starting you in the

back clearing this spring if he hears that," Jane Ann warned him.

Allister's face fell. He well knew this was true. Hector had not fully shared Mary's ambition for learning. He felt that the boy's head was getting filled with strange ideas, and that since he had learned enough to read his Bible they might let well enough alone. He was planning to take him to his own clearing with one of Johnny's boys and start them there just as soon as schooling was done. Allister reflected on this in dismay. The last place in the world he wished to go to was his old home in the far clearing. He could not go back there, though he had never dared tell even Jane Ann the reason. But his father's grave was there beside the little sister's, and his mother's voice calling across the clearing was always ringing in anguished notes into the depths of the forest. No, he would never go back there. He wanted to go far away somewhere, beyond the Barrier. He wanted to go to the Portage and see Miles Hardy, and put down the rich and powerful tyrants that were making life so hard for the settlers.

Jane Ann looked up at him towering above her, at his man's shoulders and his boy's face and was puzzled. She was saved from attempting to deal with the situation by a loud stamping of feet at the door and the entrance of her husband and two eldest sons.

The shanty was crowded when they were all in it. Snowy caps and mittens were thrown down by the fire to add to the crowded confusion. The girls ran to pour out the pease brose into the tin

plates, Hughie pulled up the long bench upon which the three big boys sat, the others brought their stools. Jane Ann sat at the end of the table opposite Johnny, but she always sat sideways on her stool that she might the easier leap up and run if a pot boiled over or the cat neared the cupboard.

Johnny seated himself silently at the head of the table and looked reprovingly at his wife. He was waiting for her to bring about the necessary order and quiet to make the asking of a blessing possible.

"Look at your children, Jane Ann," he admonished, indicating Allister and Little Johnny wrestling in a corner.

But Jane Ann had a great many affairs claiming her attention and her hungry husband, despairing of ever getting started at his meal, called out, "Whist allo' ye!" and bowing his head, said the evening grace. Johnny, as always, repeated the prayer in a very low voice and the family who were not in his immediate vicinity did not realize that the ceremony was going on until it was more than half over. Jane Ann did not recognize the fact herself until Johnny had reached, "And to Thee we will give all the glory," then she bowed her head in hurried dismay. When the Amen was pronounced and the suppressed giggles arose Jane Ann looked down the table at him in reproof.

"Well, such a man!" she ejaculated in despair. Johnny was well into his plate of pease brose by this time and paid no heed. Everyone ate hurriedly and in silence. The pioneer meals were

far from a social function; they were something to be gotten through with as quickly as possible to give strength for the next task.

When the supper was over, the table was cleared away and pushed back and a candle set in the middle of it for the evening lessons. MacWhinnie always gave them something to do at home, but there was always the pleasant hope that he would forget about it the next morning. Allister always did the task, mostly because of mental inactivity and desire to do something. It was generally a problem in arithmetic. Hughie could follow him but Little Johnny was a great tall fellow whose mind had not quite kept pace with his body and MacWhinnie's problems were a dark mystery to him. To-night the question concerned the case of a rabbit and a hound. The hound was chasing the rabbit; how many leaps would both the rabbit and the hound have to take before the latter could reach his prey. Allister figured away on a slate with a pencil that scratched loudly. Who wanted to know about how many jumps the beastie took anyhow? Little Johnnie wanted to know. He couldn't see that it mattered to anybody. Allister said the question couldn't be solved. There simply wasn't an answer to it. The Master hadn't said whether the hound was going to catch the rabbit by the neck or by the place where its tail should be. And how were they to know? He made a ditty about it, rhyming hound and round and bound, and sang it softly to *Louden's Bonnie Banks and Braes*. The older girls who had outgrown school, but who sat at the table with their

knitting in the hopes of picking up some crumbs of learning from these evening lessons were overcome with a desire for laughter.

Then Allister changed the problem to something more interesting. How many jumps would the Master make going from the school clearing to Old Rachel's Tavern with Bruce at his heels? He added Rover as a third party and made the problem more complicated, and there was so much mirth over it that Jane Ann shouted from her wheel that they must either get to their beds or to their lessons.

Johnny was seated beside the fire shaping a new axe handle, the sword hilt of the backwoodsman, and paid no attention either to his wife or his family.

Allister put the slate aside and looked significantly at Little Johnny and the latter shook his head hopelessly. For there was a real problem before the three lads this night, the difficult one of getting away from home for the evening. There were to be big doings at Red Sandy's clearing to-night. Red Sandy Junior had told them about it at school. Big Callum, the wild chieftain of the Wild McNabbs that had settled far north in a remote clearing and made their own whiskey and were fast reverting to barbarity, this Big Callum and three of his bigger brothers were coming down to take revenge on the Red MacAllisters for a supposed insult at a recent chopping bee. Red Sandy was a fiery fellow and there would surely be a fight. But how to get there was the question.

The brothers looked at Allister to solve this

problem as he had the others. If there was any chance of getting away from home he would find it.

He put away his books and went slowly over towards the fire.

"Aunt Teenie's folks said the sap was running and they'll be gathering in a few days," he remarked.

"Well, I never," cried Jane Ann from her corner where she sewed under a candle, "Johnny, the lads'll have to be gettin' the sap troughs ready."

"Aunt Katie said she wondered if she could have the big kettle first again this year."

Jane Ann turned upon him. "She said that! Did ye ever hear the like?" she enquired of her elder daughters.

It was an unwritten law of the settlements that whatever one had in the way of utensils must be lent to whoever was in need. But there was an etiquette about borrowing that Aunt Katie, the one sister of the MacAllisters, seemed never to have learned. She had had Johnny's big kettle at Hector's first for the last two sugar-makings.

Allister waited for the news to work in Jane Ann's mind. She scolded for a while and finally called to her husband.

"Did ye ever hear the like o' Katie, Johnny?"

Johnny made no reply, and Allister waited a few minutes longer then he nodded and winked at Annie. Annie was always the ally of the boys. She understood.

"Why can't the boys go and get it to-night, Mother?" she said.

The boys all knew better than to show any interest but they held their breaths while Jane Ann considered. Allister, watching her face saw the fire of her wrath needed a little more fuel.

"I don't think Aunt Katie would like that," he said to Annie's great astonishment, "I think by what she said yesterday that she—oh, well, she says she doesn't think we ought to have it, cause we could just as easy get Uncle Peter's" . . .

"And it's our own sugar kettle!" Jane Ann burst forth upon him. "And didn't I do without it all last spring and made my soap in a wee pot not big enough for a tea-kettle! Johnny, send the boys over to Hector's for the big kettle. We'll be needin' it any day now. The sap's runnin'."

Johnny looked up from his axe handle. He waved his hand towards the door, "Away with ye!" he said, "and be queek!"

CHAPTER V

THE MAGIC FLUTE

THE boys slipped from the shanty and ran down the path towards the edge of the clearing decorously enough. It might look suspicious to show too much joy over merely going out to borrow your own sugar kettle, but when they reached the path that ran across the bush to Uncle Hector's clearing Allister could not restrain a joyous whoop. Spring was in the air, the sap was stirring in their veins, they plunged into the grey gloom of the forest path making the great arches ring with their shouts. They ran on swiftly floundering through the softening snow, for though the errand to Uncle Hector's could be attended to in a short time they would need much of the fast-speeding night to get to Red Sandy's clearing away across the Big Crick and back again, and there was danger that the head of the house might not go to bed.

There was a straggling, narrow, bush road leading from the settlement of the Black MacAllisters to the clearings north of the stream where the Red MacAllisters were settled. The pioneers had not yet reached the task of bridge-building, but there was a fairly shallow ford where the road crossed and farther up the stream

a bridge constructed by nature where she had flung a great elm trunk across the water. The stream was already running free, a swollen, black flood carrying hurrying cakes of ice in a ghostly procession, so the three adventurers whistling and singing left the road and sought the log bridge above the ford. The snow was soft in the open spaces and they were forced to go slowly.

They were ploughing along, single file, Allister at the head, when he suddenly stopped bringing Little Johnny floundering upon his heels.

"What's that?" he whispered.

They stood breathing hard, to listen. The sound came again, an unmistakable cry from the blackness ahead. The backwoods boys had very little fear of the animals of the forest; wolves seldom came near the settlement, and bears generally lumbered away at the sight of a human. There were wildcats in the trees but they, too, were more afraid of man than he of them. But this sound was neither wolf nor wildcat, their keen woodsmen ears detected a human quality. The three boys remembered all the eery tales of banshees and evil spirits that were told round the fire whenever the pioneers gathered and their hair raised their woollen caps from their heads.

But the cry came again; it was unmistakably a human call, and a call for help. Even this was not very reassuring. The bogeys of the fireside tales always imitated the human voice to lure one to death. The boys drew closer together, breathing hard. Each one was hoping fervently the other would suggest running back home or on to

Uncle Hector's. But the next sound dispelled their worst fears, it was a real lusty man's voice calling for aid and the word he was shouting was MacAllister! It held them just as their heels were about to become wings. By common consent, slowly and silently, they crept towards the sound keeping the great boles of the trees between them and the unknown. The shouting grew louder but the terror lessened as they approached. Looking through the mass of bare underbrush that lined the stream bank they saw a man suspended from the log bridge and hanging over the swirling black waters. He was held from descending into the icy depths by a big, iron, sugar kettle which had been tied on his back and had fortunately fallen upon the opposite side of the log bridge. And there he hung, nicely balanced, clinging to the branches of the fallen tree and making the forest resound with his protests.

He seemed to think that the whole MacAllister settlement was responsible for his predicament and was calling them in question for their inhospitable treatment.

"Hooch!" he was roaring to the echoing forest, "Hooch! Is this the way to be treating the son of the bards, whatever? I'll be John Angus Cammell, son of Angus of Strath, and my grandfather would be playing the pipes when MacCallum Mhor would be riding down the glen to rid the land of the blasted vipers the MacDonalds. Hooch! Whatna way is this?"

The boys gave a shout of relieved laughter and ran to his aid. Old Angus Campbell the fiddler!

Though he had never visited the MacAllister settlement everyone in it knew of Old Angus. He was one of the unfortunate products of the hard usage to which many of the new settlers were condemned by those in authority. With a little colony of his friends and relatives he had settled in the southern part of the township on a sandy region covered with pines. The soft wood was easily removed but it disclosed land that was useless. The Campbells with indomitable courage rose and abandoned their useless acres and started all over again in another region. But Angus had lost his wife and son in the misery of their last winter in the sand hills and taking his two possessions, his fiddle and his iron sugar-kettle on his back, he set off a wanderer through the settlements. He had a sister who had disgraced the Clan Campbell by marrying one of the MacDonalds who had settled south of the English Block. Though Angus felt keenly the blow to his family pride he was not above paying the MacDonald a visit and had spent the winter there playing at weddings and bees, always a welcome guest. But spring was opening up and the MacDonald brother-in-law had suggested that Angus might put away the fiddle and take hold of the sap troughs, and the incensed bard had shaken the snow of the MacDonald clearing from his moccasins and come on to the Red MacAllisters. Mrs. Archie Red had tactfully suggested that Hector's folks across the Crick were badly in need of a sugar kettle and had got rid of the old man.

He was still expostulating with the clan Mac-

Allister for the beggarly way in which he was being treated when the boys ran forward shouting to him. He had given forth his wailings in his native tongue but at the sound of Allister's English he made an attempt to answer in the same language. The old man was not as nimble with the English language as he was with the bow, but he was very proud of what he knew and never lost an opportunity to parade it in Highland company.

"She'll pe Angus Cammel, ta piper," he announced with much dignity considering his position. "She'll pe a sister to Dougal' MacDonald's wife wis ta long legs."

The boys understood this to be a reference to Long Dougal, and without further introduction they scrambled out upon the log. Hughie whispered to Little Johnny that it would be good fun to give the old boy a bit of a dip in the water, not enough to hurt, but just to hear him yell, but Allister, who was always the one to lead in such an enterprise sternly forbade. Never! What if the fiddle got wet? No mother rescuing her babe could have been more careful and solicitous. The great doings at Red Sandy's were forgotten. Here was a fiddle! They would have a tune this very night!

When the traveller was finally dislodged and slid down the log to safety, Little Johnny was for leading the way to Uncle Hector's, but again Allister interposed. Why here was the very kettle they wanted, just as if they had found it growing on a tree. They did not need to go to Uncle Hector's now! Why, Aunt Jane Ann would be very

much annoyed if they did not bring the kettle home at once. He was very righteous about it, and though Little Johnny did not understand he was accustomed to follow Sandy and obediently turned and plodded homeward leading the bard with them.

Any sort of guest, even a wandering tramp, was joyfully received in the pioneer shanty and Jane Ann and Johnny gave the old man a warm welcome. A pair of dry socks, a plate of brose and best of all a nip from the bottle that was kept on the top shelf of the tall cupboard and the visitor forgot his woes and warmed up sufficiently to give them what Allister was waiting impatiently for and what had brought him home, a tune on the fiddle. He had heard a fiddle only once. It was in Old Rachel's tavern the winter before when Uncle Johnny had taken him and Little Johnny with him to the English Block mill for flour. The lilt of its thrilling notes were still ringing in his head and he was hungry for more.

But old Angus Campbell was something different from the amateur fiddler the boy had heard. There was something of the artist in the old man's fingers. He took the instrument from its wrappings as carefully as a mother handling her child, and after some twistings and twangings he softly drew the bow across the strings.

And thereupon magic entered the little shanty in the forest. The family sat breathless listening to the lovely strains, Jane Ann with a home sick pang that not all the hardships of the new land had brought. But Allister sat tranced as one who

looked upon things not lawful for man to utter. The rough, log walls of the cabin fell away and there opened out vistas of wonder and beauty—the road to the stars! Thoughts and emotions hitherto unknown surged through him; he was consumed with a longing that was a terrible pain. He was shaken to the very centre of his being. He was missing something—missing life! Away off there somewhere beyond the solid wall of forest that hemmed him in something waited for him: glory and romance and beauty and mighty achievements—the Celestial City of the Pilgrims, the world of which Shakespeare wrote!

Long after all the rest of the family were asleep he lay awake on his straw bed. He did not hear the deep snorings of old Angus in his warm bed over in the corner of the loft by the chimney nor the far off yowl of a wildcat nor the gruff complainings of Bruce below. He did not hear even the floods of spring rain pounding on the roof, nor the great organ notes of the March wind as it swept through the forest. He was hearing only that teasing, lilting, irresistible call to come away, away. And lying there awake he made a vow to his own soul that nothing in the world, not all the uncles in the settlement nor school masters in the world would hold him in the bush; and having sworn to this covenant with himself he rolled over on the straw and went to sleep.

Spring might be said to have come that very night with old Angus and his music. A night of warm rain and a day of brilliant sunshine set all the folk to work hauling out the sap troughs from

the stable loft, and hauling their kettles to the sugar bush for the boiling. Of course no one, young or old, was expected to go to school during sugar-making. Indeed MacWhinnie himself spent most of his time in his own sugar bush so Allister was relieved for a time. And every night old Angus brought out his fiddle and not the wildest fight that the Wild McNabbs could have staged could drag Allister by night from his own fireside.

Spring had descended upon the clearings with such a rush that by the time the sugar-making was finished bare, brown patches of earth were showing between the stumps and there was too much going on for Jane Ann and Johnny to notice that Allister had not gone back to school. But Aunt Minnie came over one day to give Jane Ann a hand with her spring soap-making, a task at which Minnie was an artist, and she discovered the delinquency.

Allister, coming home from the last trip to the sugar bush early in the afternoon, found the two women in the wet, windy, chip-strewn yard, their skirts turned up, their heads tied up in woollen kerchiefs standing over a great pot of boiling lye amid whirling clouds of smoke, and looking like the witches in *Macbeth* he told himself.

It was a blinding, shining, windy April day. The snow was running away in a hundred noisy rivulets and the blackened stumps and the wet patches of ash-strewn earth showed like scars in the pitiless brilliance of the sunlight. There had been a tremendous lashing rain the night before and the low space between the house and the stable

was flooded with black water. The tall pine tops sang and swayed in the sun and wind. There was a great calling of wild geese overhead. And as he passed from the swamp Allister heard the opening notes of the spring orchestra, the shrill pipings of the frogs. From the barnyard behind the dwindling strawstack came the pleasant clatter of hens and the bleatings of two new little lambs that had arrived just a night or so before.

Jane Ann was making swift excursions to and from the "leach," the tilted barrel of ashes from which dripped the lye. She was carrying the pungent liquid to the great, black kettle swung over the fire, screaming to the children to be away from under her feet or they would be scalded to death. Little Maggie and Jimmie were splashing about in the mud and water, very wet and supremely happy. Allister slipped behind the woodpile and into the house unnoticed, for he could hear the wail of the fiddle and Aunt Minnie would keep him talking if she saw him.

But eight-year-old Jeannie had started to school as soon as the bitterest winter weather was over and she was already coming up the path that led from the road, proudly carrying her book and her little dinner pail. Minnie, with one eye on the boiling cauldron of soap, was watching the opening from the forest to see when Allister would be coming.

"Eh, I'll be glad of the day when I can get my feet on the ground again, Minnie," Jane Ann cried stamping in her heavy boots through the blackened snow. If her visitor had been any one else

Jane Ann would have added the choice bit of gossip that Betsy had brought her on her last visit, the news that Teenie was getting that uppity that she was not going in her bare feet any more and neither would she allow her eldest girls to do so. But Jane Ann restrained her tongue with some regret. Minnie never indulged in gossip herself and always rebuked it in another. It was a great treat to a pioneer woman when a neighbor came to give her a day's help with her work, more for the companionship than for the assistance, but there was always something lacking when Minnie was the visitor.

"And where's Sandy?" Minnie asked as Jeannie came up the path. "Did the Master keep him in?"

Jane Ann hastened to explain but it was too late. Jeannie gave it all away. Sandy had not gone to school since he stopped for the sugar-making. Minnie sighed and shook her head and wondered what Hector would say.

"Katie was sayin' that Sandy was spendin' too much time listenin' to Old Angus and his fiddle," she added sadly.

Jane Ann made some vague explanation, "Oh, he'll settle down all right," she added hopefully.

Minnie shook her head discouragingly, "I'll not know, Jenann. Poor Neil was just like that, ye mind, jist hereaway, thereaway, hither and skither after some new thing like the Athenians. Sandy's a MacAllister, and the MacAllisters were ever up and away, Jenann, up and away. The lad needs a change of heart, as I was saying to Hector the other day. He is still under the power of sin

and in the bonds of iniquity. All we like sheep have gone astray. What use will all his schoolin' do him unless he repents and turns to the Lord?"

Jane Ann's round, rosy face grew long and solemn. Somehow Sandy's case always seemed most discouraging after Minnie had dealt with it.

Allister, his head ringing with glorious melodies, escaped from the shanty by way of the wood-pile, but he could not escape the long arm of the law represented in Uncle Hector. There came a command the next morning for Sandy to come over and explain why he was not at school.

Sandy was very plausible. Uncle Johnny had been very busy; Hughie had cut his foot on the scythe; the run of sap had been greater than ever before; the sheep-shearing had to be done earlier this spring; Aunt Jenann had wanted water carried from the spring to wash the blankets; and finally, the Master had taught him all he could; he had said so only last week. Allister did not explain that the information had been shouted above the resounding thuds of the tawse as it descended upon his stubborn back, nor that McWhinnie had added that there was no mortal man living could teach him anything!

Hector made no comment, but as the school term was drawing to a close he gave commands that Allister must come over to his clearing and help with the summer work.

Allister went willingly, anything was better than school, but he came back to the old home every evening, not only because he was lonely and homesick for Little Johnny's companionship but

because he could not rest at night unless he heard Angus play a tune. The work in the litle stumpy fields was desperately heavy and many a night he crossed the bush after a day of toil, blackened and sweaty, and ready to fall from sheer weariness, when the thin, alluring notes of the fiddle would float out from the doorway where Old Angus sat playing, and new life would course through him and set his weary feet flying.

It was a hard summer and only the reward at the end of the day kept the boy's high spirits from drooping. Hector's childless home was so different from Johnny's. Old Granny MacAllister, the mother of all the Black MacAllisters and Katie their only unmarried sister, lived under Hector's roof. Granny sat all day in the warm chimney corner and drank tea and smoked her pipe and called Allister endearing names, and Aunt Katie scrubbed and scoured and scolded, while Aunt Minnie read her Bible and prophesied the end of the world. Allister felt, too, beside the loneliness and the lack of young companionship the absence of something he could not well define. It was really a lack of home comforts. For though Jane Ann's housekeeping was always subject to tremendous upheavals, when there would be baking and churning, washing and scrubbing, spinning and soap-making all going on at once, the place never lost its feeling of hominess. There were always a few blooming plants in the one window, carefully shielded from the frost on winter nights, there was a bright, patch-work quilt on the bed in the corner and a hooked mat before it, and always

a sense of cleanliness and wholesomeness. And yet you could always throw your boots into the corner and scrape the snow from your socks before the fire unreprieved. Jane Ann had a perfect though unconscious genius for home making.

But in Aunt Minnie's house there was nothing of the ornamental. She considered bright quilts and mats worldly. The low rafters of the shanty were hung with the usual things that festooned the ceiling of the pioneer home, ears of corn, strings of dried apples, drying wool and smoked hams. But there were all sorts of other things hanging on Aunt Minnie's rafters that a tall boy who had not yet learned to stoop was apt to bring down upon his careless head.

But he fled from it all when his day's work was done, though Minnie did not approve of his running off at night. But her husband said, "Let the lad go, he's young," and Allister went as an arrow from the bow.

Sometimes he came running out of the bush in a cloud of mosquitoes collected from the swamp and Jane Ann looking out from the door would scream on him to dive into the cedars and rid himself of his tormentors before he dared enter. Sometimes he found Old Angus playing at the doorway in a protecting "smudge." Once when the day's toil had been so heavy that his boy's frame was exhausted his Uncle sent him home before the darkness had put an end to his own long day. That was a night of wonder. He sat on the doorstep in perfect content listening to Angus play. From the foot of the corn-field came the tinkle of a bell

and the three children emerged from the green depths with the cows, Bruce and Rover with them. The two older girls hurried out to the barn with the pails while Jane Ann called Hughie to run and make a smudge, for the cows were coming up the lane madly whirling their tails. The dewy night was closing in softly on the clearing, the fire-flies waved their little lanterns along the edge of the back fields and the whip-poor-will called from the darkness beyond. The sound of milk streaming into the pails mingled with the music of the fiddle. The sweet smells of pine and musk floated up from the woods. Jane Ann was calling the children to come away and wash their feet and get to bed. Angus was playing softly, "When the kye come hame." Something of the peace of the scene entered the boy's tired heart. It was good to be here. It was the first time the fiddle had failed to call him to be up and away. The heavy toil had well-nigh quenched the fire of ambition, as it was slowly quenching it in the hearts of the other boys.

Midsummer brought stifling heat in the close rings of the forest, relieved from time to time by terrific thunder-storms. Wherever the heavy canopy of trees had been removed and no seed sown a perfect jungle of growth choked the open spaces. Wild plum and cherry trees and alder bushes encroached upon the clearing and masses of red and black raspberries and luscious gooseberries grew along the brush fences and tempted both the children and the bears. Jane Ann and the older girls were busier than ever picking and

preserving. They had scarcely time to look at the garden; nevertheless it blossomed gloriously, and the Prince's Feather waved, taller and more glowing than ever.

The men worked every moment of daylight, and often into the night. The little wheat fields that had to be hoed between the stumps, and sown by hand, had now to be reaped with a sickle, and the precious sheaves spread on the barn floor ready for the flail. There were potatoes and corn to be harvested and always there was the little more of land to be wrested from the forest.

Autumn brought a riot of nuts and wild grapes that had to be harvested. The warm October days brought the wild pigeons in such flocks that the clearing was blue with their whirring wings, and the settlers lived luxuriously on the delicious tid-bits roasted on a spit before the fire. Squirrels and chipmonks scurried about among the falling leaves; the cattle and sheep that had been buried in the undergrowth all summer, appeared now along the fences, the forest trees rained down showers of gold, and the sumach lit her flaming candle and announced that summer was ended.

When the first heavy frost turned the earth to iron Allister went back to school. He did not go willingly, but the only alternative was to go back with Little Johnny to his old home. Hector put the choice before him and he sullenly chose the school, dragging Little Johnny with him. Little Johnny was growing a beard and looking shyly at one of the Red MacAllister girls, and would have liked to start a home in the Far Clearing

but Allister would not hear of it. He promised his brother if he would come with him this winter he would never trouble him again, and very reluctantly they turned their steps once more towards the little shanty where MacWhinnie ruled.

Old Angus had wandered about the settlement a little during the summer, but when the woodbine along the forest trails put out its scarlet banners he returned to Johnny's shanty. This was just as Allister would have it and he set his mind to the task of getting his hands on the fiddle.

At first he had been content to sit and listen to Angus, dreaming golden dreams, but now he longed to make the music himself. He begged and pleaded just to be allowed to draw the bow across the strings. But old Angus was adamant. No profaning hands would be allowed to touch his sacred instrument.

It happened that this autumn saw a great revival of tales of ghosts and goblins and all things supernatural. Little Collins, a travelling shoe-maker who came round once in two years with his roll of leather, his bees-wax and his hemp and stayed in a clearing long enough to make shoes for all its inhabitants, came this year; and he always started these eery tales. He told the same stories each year, to be sure, but they were wonderful yarns of strange happenings to his grandfather in the old country, headless-horsemen, blue lights in a graveyard, a dark man who disappeared in a burst of flame—all these had been related to him by his grandmother and, as

Little Collins always stated, there wasn't a more truthful woman in all Ireland.

Little Collins always brought about a revival of the supernatural. He was encouraged greatly by Watty Fraser who was the community humorist. Watty lived with his elder brother Wully Fraser, the weaver, in their bachelor shanty on a wedge of land between the two MacAllister settlements. They were accepted as cousins by both clans as their grandmother had been a MacAllister. Watty was a great talker and was much admired by the Black MacAllisters who were silent men. He would sit half the night by a neighbor's fire while Little Collins sewed shoes, and match every blood-curdling tale with a worse one. When they sat spinning such yarns about Jane Ann's hearth the boys would listen with hair rising. Little Maggie and Jimmie would creep closer to their mother's skirts, and she would whisper to them to wash their feet and away to their bed in the corner.

Even Aunt Minnie was prone to believe some of the dread tales. A body never knew, she confessed. She remembered how the dog howled under the window the night her mother died.

Uncle Hector scoffed loudly at them all.

"What will you be talkin' about, woman?" he asked. "Is it likely that the Almighty sent a special message to the dogs to tell them that your mother was going to die?"

But all the women could remember similar experiences, and when Watty told of seeing a light in an old, abandoned clearing beyond the Big Crick, where rumor said a man had been mur-

dered in the early days, there was no one that felt quite safe till he was home and in his bed.

Old Angus seemed to be the only one who was unmoved by these gruesome tales. He was loudly boastful as to what he should do if he met a ghost. Nothing ever frightened the bard, but Allister and Little Johnny discovered that after a night of ghostly talk by the fire the old man could not be induced to go to the barn.

By early winter the tales had crystallized into one form. There was a dark man, perfectly black from head to heel who had been seen along the roads and in lonely spots. Watty heard of one man from the English Block who had dared to speak to him and he vanished in a burst of flame and the smell of sulphur was something fearsome. Young Archie MacDonald who came all the way across the bush from the MacDonald settlement sparking Teenie's eldest girl, was reported to have seen the apparition near Watty Fraser's shanty.

There were some of the more sophisticated who suspected that Watty knew more of these appearances than he would tell. There were things hidden away in the loft of Watty's shanty that would have reassured some of the more fearful ones on the dark trails at night. And it was Watty who dropped the seed of giving Old Angus a scare into the fertile soil of Allister's brain. Here it took root and blossomed into a grand scheme for getting hold of the fiddle.

The night that Johnny and Jane Ann had their husking bee Old Angus was excessively boastful. He would like to meet the Black Man, he declared,

and scoffed at all those who feared the dark forest trails at night. But he played so alluringly for the young folk to dance afterwards that they were willing to let him say anything.

Allister and Little Johnny walked with Watty Fraser to the edge of the clearing when he left. They stood a long time at the brush fence talking and the two boys returned bursting with laughter. The next day after school they made a detour to the weaver's shanty and came home by lone paths with a bundle which they hid in the bush until after night-fall.

They were all ready now for the great deed, they had but to await an opportunity. No use trying anything like that when the older folk were at home. Jane Ann might put up with ordinary pranks played on each other but she would not countenance any one tormenting Old Angus. And Johnny would not put up with any such doings they well knew. He was a quiet man who generally left the management of the family to his wife, but he was subject to violent outbursts of wrath when unduly annoyed, and the boys rather felt towards him like people who dwelt on the slope of a volcano; no matter how calm it might be for years who knew when there might be an eruption?

But like great generals, Allister laid his plans and was all ready when at last the opportunity came. Granny had been sick all fall and one night when the first snow fall made good sleighing Jane Ann and Johnny took the three younger children and bidding the older ones attend to their books drove away to Hector's clearing.

Effie and Annie, busy with their spinning and their knitting, had to be advised of the great plan. They were both very sympathetic. Old Angus was untidy in his habits and made a great deal more work for the young housekeepers. Allister announced loudly that they were going out to do the chores and the three boys disappeared. Old Angus sat dozing by the fire, and the boys had no sooner disappeared than the girls put out all the candles but one and slipped away to the dark corner behind the bed to watch the fun.

They were no sooner settled than the door opened silently, and a terrible-looking figure entered. Annie said afterwards she could hardly keep from screaming even though she knew who it was. It was a tall, dark figure with a black face, gleaming eyes, and a long, snaky beard of coal black. It was terrible to gaze upon even though one knew that the beard was really the tail of a horse from the MacDonald settlement that had fallen into a beartrap and had to be shot. It looked as if it had come from the bottomless pit.

At the crucial moment Annie let a heavy stick of wood fall upon the floor. Old Angus awoke with a start, and peered round the shadowy room. Then he caught sight of the figure standing in the shadows by the door. He gave a gasp and with a muttered prayer in Gaelic he leaped with the swiftness and agility of sixteen for the ladder leading to the loft. He turned one horrified glance back as he disappeared only to see the dread apparition leaping after him. He bounded into the

loft with a yell of terror, the black man at his heels!

Whatever the dark visitant did to Old Angus up there in the loft was never quite clear to the watchers below. But when the demon was finally exorcised from the shanty he fled with Angus's fiddle. While Angus could be heard for long after indulging in loud prayers. He could not be induced to come down again even when told that it was all a trick. But Allister went up to the loft and magnanimously promised not to let Watty or anyone else know if he would promise to let him play the fiddle.

Angus feared ridicule above all things and dreaded Watty's tongue. So to the amazement of all the family not in the secret, he suddenly became generous and allowed Sandy to use his fiddle and was even teaching him how to play.

There were no more threats of running away and going to the Portage now. Allister hurried home from school and never left the home hearth at night. After a while the old man took a little pleasure in teaching him, for the boy was an apt pupil. Old Angus had a yellow, tattered music book in the depths of the old carpet bag that hung above his bed and he brought it out and taught the boy to play by note.

And so a new world opened out to Allister, the world of self-expression. The fiddle became his idol and it held him in school for the rest of the winter.

Sometimes he played gay ditties so that the feet would not stay on the floor, sometimes wailing

melodies that caused Jane Ann to cry out to him to stop for she could not stand it, and again he would draw his bow across the strings in sweeping chords that would make Jane Ann pause in her spinning and look anxiously at him, a strange fear at her heart. There was something bold and daring about the tune, something that filled her with a vague uneasiness. She was catching the opening strains of a new march to which the boy's life was being set.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHINING TRAIL

THE MacAllister settlement was still in that early stage when the sound of a neighbor's footfall was sweet music. As a winter visitor always approached silently, and as nobody ever knocked on a pioneer door, its sudden opening was often a joyous surprise to those inside. But there was almost always a dog lying at the pioneer fire-side to tell the dull-eared humans when anyone was coming.

Old Bruce was a master at announcing a visitor. At a wolf's howl coming out of the blackness of the forest, or the scent of a bear prowling about the pig-pen, the guardian of the hearth would leap to his feet, flaming with wrath, every hair on his back erect with rage. Mankind, of course, had a different reception. Should the human approaching from the edge of the clearing bring the scent of a stranger, the old dog would rise, rumbling suspiciously and when the door opened he was right there bursting in a storm of barking. But if the visitor was of the MacAllister clan, Bruce knew it afar off. He would rise languidly, as one who knew his services were not needed, but wishing to show proper respect for a member of the family. And after a

brief remark, that was hardly a bark, and a friendly wag of his tail, he would turn round a couple of times, and curl up by the fire.

To-night he gave his usual announcement, "Somebody is coming," while Rover seconded the remark with growls and whines. Then Bruce added with voice and tail, "Don't make a fuss, it's only a neighbor," and almost as the door opened, he gave a short bark and lay down again, Rover obediently at his side.

A tall, thin man stooped beneath the lintel of the doorway and strode into the shanty. His long knee-boots creaked loudly with the frost, and his beard was white with rime but his greeting was:

"Good-evenin' folks. It's a nice warm night. They tell me the sap's runnin'."

Everyone burst into laughter. No one was more welcome at a fireside than Watty Fraser. He spoke always in a high thin melancholy drawl, and his face was deeply serious, and never more so than when he was making fun.

Johnny rose from his bench, smiling broadly, but emitting only a brief "Good Night," and still holding to his sword hilt, the axe-handle at which he always worked.

"Come away, Watty, man, Come away," cried Jane Ann heartily. She did not leave her wheel as she would have done had the guest been a woman, but she saw to his wants.

"Come away to the fire, Watty, come away! Run and bring the broom, Jeannie, and sweep Watty's feet. Eh, what a night to come over! It's jist awful kind o' ye! Effie, lass, put Watty's mitts

by the fire there. Annie, what are ye standin' there for? Bring up a bench for Watty. Come away and get yer feet warmed. Eh, such a night. And how is your poor brother, Wully?"

All the women spoke of the old weaver in terms of commiseration as was fitting, seeing that he and Watty were lone bachelors without a woman to care for them.

The visitor refused to be seated. He had come over by the short cut across the bush from Hector's at Minnie's bidding. Red Sandy's folks had sent word they were coming over to Hector's. Sandy Red had been to the mill at the English Block and had brought home some wild news about an election. They had sent word for Peter's and Teenie's folks to come, too. So they must all bundle up and come right away, Minnie had said. The road round by the Crick was just fine. Jimmie had been through and broke it late in the afternoon with his team.

"So I jist dropped in to tell ye ye was goin' to a spree," Watty drawled. "I knowed the girls would never forgive me if I didn't give them a bid, and I might be comin' over here lookin' for a wife some day."

The girls screamed, and everyone laughed and began to run about in high glee. It was a marvellous thing to be going even over to Uncle Hector's on a visit. The boys flung away their books joyously. They dragged on their coats and dashed out to the stable for the oxen and sleigh.

Jane Ann ran about the shanty in pleased excitement scolding everyone and giving orders for

everyone to bundle up. The older girls flew to the big kist in the corner behind the bed. They must put on a ribbon and a bit of lace, for Aunt Teenie's girls would be there and they were great for dressing up. Their mother, meanwhile, was as anxiously examining the contents of her cupboard. For though a hostess must provide something to eat and drink, no guest must take her family to a neighbor's without some contribution to the feast. There was a jar of plum preserves sealed with resin on the top shelf, and a pile of sweet scones, and some homemade cheese. Jane Ann swept them from her shelves with a lavish hand. Old Angus grumbled at leaving the fireside, but he knew that his pupil would take his fiddle willy-nilly, and he must go.

Coats and caps and mittens, hoods and shawls were piled upon the three excited children, and when everyone was bundled up to the eyes the ox-sleigh came creaking to the door. Johnny carefully banked up the fire with ashes, and bade Bruce and Rover lie down and watch the house. They complained grievously, and when Rover crouched at Allister's feet and broke into a terrible howl, little Jimmie burst into tears. Effie reminded him sharply of how Bruce and Rover had fought with Uncle Hector's dogs the last time they went a-visiting, but Jane Ann, tying her woollen hood under her chin said, "Well, well, let the poor things come." Her husband obediently opened the door and the two dogs shot forth and capered about the sleigh in a snow-storm, uttering yelps of delight.

Johnny closed the door again, slipping inside the string that lifted the latch. Jane Ann had never got over her Old Country terror of the silent Indians who sometimes stalked through the settlement on the way down to the trading posts with their furs.

"Ye never can tell when one o' them fearsome black buddies might come along," she always said as an excuse for her strange habit of always leaving her door barred.

Old Angus and the women sat on the straw in the bottom of the sleigh, as there were no seats. They children lay down with a heavy bed-quilt spread over them. The father stood up in the front of the sleigh to drive and the three older boys, the dogs leaping about them, dashed away at Watty's heels towards the short cut across the bush.

The oxen plodded slowly down the rough, crooked, forest road, a white tunnel through the blue darkness of the mighty trees, with a strip of cold starry sky above. The low sleigh bumped over great roots that sprawled across the road, it swirled round huge stumps and plunged into tremendous "cradle-holes." Though the winter was still young there were already many drifts in the open spaces, and twice they all upset into them. But nobody minded, and the children took it all with great glee. Johnny floundered along beside the sleigh where the road was at its worst and roared and gee-hawed continuously at the oxen. Indeed Jane Ann often said that he talked far more to the beasts than he did to his children.

They were all stiff and chilled but happy when at last they drove into Hector's clearing and heard Bruce and Rover fulfilling Effie's prophecy in uproarious company with Uncle Hector's dogs. The boys had made good time in crossing by the path through the bush.

Jane Ann and the girls were scrambling stiffly from the sleigh when there arose a thrilling tonk-a-tonk of unaccustomed sleigh-bells, the children screamed with wonder, for there, down the road from the other end of the clearing, came the great sight of the settlement: Uncle Jimmy's sleigh and team of horses! They were as yet the only ones. The big, heavy team seemed to fairly fly down the road and Johnny's family stood beside their ox-sled and gazed in wonder and envy very satisfying to Teenie enthroned on the front seat of the fine sleigh. Those who had been fortunate enough to ride behind the horses were never done telling how it fairly took your breath away, and how the trees just seemed to fly past.

Jimmie had prospered far above his brethren and everyone knew it was largely due to his smart, red-headed wife. In recognition of the fact the family were always designated by their mother's name. Peter's eldest boy, Johnny, was known at school as Johnny Peter, but Jimmie's son of the same name was distinguished as Johnny Teenie.

At the sound of the sleighbells the shanty door flew open and Hector's wife was calling them into the warmth and light. Minnie considered Teenie's ambitions very worldly. Consequently she did not express any admiration of the new outfit, but her

welcome was none the less warm. The two families poured into the little shanty, while Hector caught up his cap and went out to the stable with the men and boys.

They all went first to receive Granny's welcome. She was eagerly awaiting the company, sitting in her warm chimney corner, a thin, stooped figure with a checked, woollen shawl about her meagre shoulders and a frilled, white cap on her grey head. As the door opened she took her clay pipe from her toothless mouth and turned to welcome them rapturously. Though Granny MacAllister had followed her sons to the new country when she had passed seventy she had grappled successfully with all the hardships of the pioneer life with one exception. The English language had beaten her, and her grandchildren had many a giggle over her attempts to wrestle with it, in the presence of her two Lowland daughters-in-law. But she had all the language of love at her tongue's end in the Gaelic. She showered upon each grandchild a dozen endearing epithets, as she clasped each in her arms and patted her on the back.

Bonnets and shawls were shaken, feet were stamped and swept until the shanty was in a snow-storm. The door had scarcely closed on Jane Ann's and Teenie's families when it flew open again and here was Betsy alighted from the ox-sleigh, ploughing through the drifts to the door with her five girls while the five boys went on with their father and the oxen to the stable. Jane Ann set them all laughing by calling to Betsy as she waded through the snow:

"Eh, Betsy, I see you're still takin' your constitutionals!"

More wrappings undone, more rapturous greetings from Granny, and more snowstorms about the fire-place. Then another shout at the door. It flew open and in streamed the mother and daughters of Red Sandy's family from across the Big Crick. Minnie and Katie fairly ran out into the snow to greet them, for the folk of the other clan rarely came across the dividing line. There was a joyous burst of talk and laughter. It was a rare and glorious experience to be in a crowd of friends. The women gathered in one corner the girls in another. There was so much to be said by these wives and daughters of the silent Mac-Allisters. There was the new, green dye that Teenie's girls had used for their new dresses, a pattern for a quilt that had come over from the English Block, a recipe for preserving the wild pigeons in the fall so that you might have a change from salt pork in the winter; the new baby that had just arrived at Peter Red's Mary's, the baby that was expected next month at another shanty.

Red Sandy's folks had picked up old Wully Fraser, the weaver, on the way. He was wrapped to the eyes in his plaid, a tall, stooped, gentle, old man, with large, enquiring blue eyes. He stood about in embarrassment until the men and boys began to gather from the barn. They were streaming in now stamping the snow from their boots and shoe-packs and moccasins. Granny's loving greetings had all to be said again to her sons and her tall grandsons. She always had some especial

endearments for Neil's orphan lad, which he bore with much misery. She had not seen him for two weeks, and she wept over him, kissing him and clapping him on the back and smoothing his curly hair. Allister had never learned to speak the Gaelic as his mother had never known it, but he understood it and writhed under his Grandmother's fond names. Eh, but wasn't he the beautiful one, so tall and so handsome, just like her lost Neilly, Oh, but he was the darling, the best-beloved, the adored. Well the victim knew that the other boys were listening in spasms of silent laughter. He squirmed away at last from the old woman's embraces vowing terrible vengeance on young Gorry Red for his loud chuckles.

There were scarcely enough seats for the company, but with the youngest sitting on the floor, the girls on the edge of the bed in the corner where the babies were laid, the boys on kegs and up-turned tubs they all managed to be made comfortable. The men crowded together on one side of the fire, a row of curved backs on benches, their dark, weatherbeaten faces lit up fitfully whenever they applied a lighted splinter to their pipes. The women gathered on the opposite side with their knitting, for though the pioneer fathers might sit idle of a rare evening, the mothers' hands were never empty. The boys crowded into the darkest corner farthest from the fire and the candles. It was cold there but the freedom from oversight was worth the discomfort.

At such gatherings Allister's place was always the centre of this group. He could keep them

entertained for a whole evening with his imitations of his elders: old Wully Fraser saying a long blessing at the table, Dougald Red leading in prayer at the Sabbath service, Aunt Minnie prophesying the end of the world, Aunt Teenie describing the filth and untidiness of the McNabb shanty. The only persons in the settlement whom he refused to impersonate were Jane Ann, Johnny and Hector.

But to-night he kept in the circle of men about the fire. For Watty had told them on their way across the bush that there were to be great doings to-night. There had come a call from the Front for the men of the MacAllister settlement, and they would see what was what to-night. It had all been thrillingly vague and ominous. It sounded like war, or a clan rising of ancient days. So Allister left the punishment of his enemy, Gorry Red, to a later time and dragging Little Johnny with him he slipped in behind the bench where Uncle Hector was sitting.

At first the talk was not very exciting, just what it always was at these fireside gatherings: the old land and a comparison of its advantages with the new; the easy and idle life of the gentry and their unrighteous grants of land; and of course the Atlantic Ocean and the terrifying voyage across it.

Then, whenever the neighbors gathered Sandy Red and Watty Fraser always vied with each other in relating their fathers' experiences in trying to get land from the authorities some twenty years earlier. They thought it was hard now.

Huh! Red Sandy assured them they knew nothing about it. He was a broad-shouldered, thick-set, short man this leader of the Red MacAllisters. His bristling red beard and hair and eyebrows were but a pale hint of the fiery spirit within. He was a constant astonishment to his silent cousins, the Black MacAllisters, with his fluent flow of talk. Watty Fraser, the next best talker in the settlement, had very little chance when Sandy Red was present. Sandy was given to launching on a long story with his pipe going furiously, but it was sure to give out first and the tale had to be suspended until the smoke was working well again. It was during these intervals of re-lighting and puffing up again that Watty would get in his story. He was not always finished when Sandy was ready and going well again, but he never attempted to stem the flood of the Red MacAllister's eloquence.

"Eh, I mind how my father got his first piece o' land from the Gentry down in York back there before the twenties," Sandy and his pipe were going at top speed now. "Man, you'd think they jist sat down for a week to study out how to keep the settlers off the land. They couldn't 'a done any better if they had. First my father had to get a petition to go before the Governor and his Executive Council!" All the magnates of the land were in this body, civil, military, and cleric, and Sandy knew them all, and snapped out all their names and titles.

But the pipe gave up in exhaustion when the glorious roll was finished which gave Watty a

chance to insert a humorous description of these same grandees who ruled Upper Canada. All potentates they were, living in unbelievable grandeur, he declared. They had prancing horses and red cutters and so many buffalo robes that they couldn't use them all but had to let some of them hang out behind in the wind.

No one ever knew whether Watty was telling the truth or not, and this certainly sounded like fiction. But there was no time to enquire for Sandy's pipe was puffing for a fresh start.

Yes sir, you had to put up a humble petition to this mighty Governor and his princes. They were supposed to meet once a week but some times they couldn't take time off their eating and drinking and driving round so you just had to sit down and wait till they were pleased to listen to you. Many a good man got tired waiting and went off to the States!

"My father waited two weeks," puffed Sandy, "and at last they condescended to meet and look at his petition. And they were so kind and condescending that they gave him a paper and told him to go"—the pipe was still going strong but Sandy paused here, this was a dramatic moment, "to the Honorable Commissioner of Crown Lands," he rolled off the high sounding titles with great unction, "the honorable Commissioner of Crown Lands, if ye please, next to the Surveyor General's Office."

The listeners always smiled here. For everyone knew that when Red Sandy had had a drop too much from the Grog Boss at logging or raising

he was sure to go home through the bush reeling and roaring and making the forest ring with the hated titles," the Honorable Commissioner of Crown Lands next to the Surveyor General's office!" as though summoning that personage across leagues of forest.

"And then you had to get a go-between to look after your land and keep the rascals from cheatin' you," Watty interposed, for the pipe had been blown out in the blast of Red Sandy's ire. "A go-between, if you please as if you was a Chinese Turk or some such haythen petitioning the King of England. And you had to pay the crater every day jist to sit and wait till the grandees were willing to listen to him."

Here Sandy burst in again but Watty's attention was distracted. Katie MacAllister was sitting on the other side of the fire plaiting a straw hat for the next summer's work in the hot fields. It was an accepted custom in the settlement that when a young woman made a straw hat for a youth it was equivalent to an announcement of their engagement. Watty was seized with a cold fear. Being the only young-old bachelor in the settlement and Katie the only old maid he had been teased about her until he was nervous lest he drift into a compromising position.

"Who're you makin' the straw hat for, Aunt Katie?" asked Teenie Ellen, eldest daughter of Teenie, a pert lass with bright eyes and red curls. "It must be for your fellow," she added with a bright glance towards Watty.

"It will be for your Uncle Peter," Katie an-

swered mildly, though her faded cheek flushed. "I've been making one for each of the boys, whatever." Katie always spoke of her brothers as "the boys." Watty breathed freely again and burst into an opening. It was his opinion that they'd all be better off if they'd gone to the States. Things weren't much better at the Capital than they used to be.

"Eh dear me," Minnie cried turning to her women guests, "Don't let me hear o' anybody goin' to the States. It's a tarrible wicked hole. There's Little Collins, the cobbler, he's been there and the stories the buddy tells about the wicked goins on is jist fair past belief. Sodom and Gomorrah! Sodom and Gomorrah!"

Old Wully Fraser had been silently listening, lighting and relighting his old clay pipe. The flame lit up his high forehead and his large, kind eyes.

"Eh, lads," he said in his high, thin voice which Jane Ann called a "whinge," "this is no such a bad place after all. It was hard to get here I'll admit, but it's worth all the trouble. Mind ye, me and Watty got 240 bushels of taties off that bit patch we've got cleared, 240 bushels o' the best taties ye iver tasted and all out o' jist seven bushel seed! Tod, we did that, Watty lad."

"Aye," Watty countered, "And what good will they do ye? Ye can't eat them all. Ye might as well try to eat the maples off the south end o' the clearin'. They'll jist rot on us. Give us a road out to a market, I say."

Mrs. Sandy Red jerked her knitting impa-

tiently. She was a Lowland body with a strong rolling, purring sort of accent. "Eh, dinna pretend tae tell me it's better here than at hame," she burst out. "Ah'd rather pick up ma meat from amang ither fowk's feet in Scotland than live braw here."

"Tut, tut," cried Teenie, who had been a Glasgow lass, "We've no rent to pay here, woman. We niver hear o' Twin Day and we can sleep as sound in May as any month o' the year."

Old Wully Fraser nodded his shaggy head gently. "Eh, eh, aye, aye!" he said in his high sing song. "Ah mind there was a death from starvation in the parish we lived in ivery year. Yes, yes, ivery year for eleven year, I mind. And here's me and Watty got that many taties we jist don't know what to do wi' them. Oh, aye, aye." There was silence for a little and the old man continued his song. "Aye, oh, aye! And the meat we eat. Eh, but the Lord's been good to us. There's times when I'm scrapin' the bits o' meat from the plates for the dogs and the cat that I mind I've seen manys the day that we'd be blythe to have it for oorsels. And the tears are jist like to rin ower ma' face to think o' the poor, starvin' fowk at hame. Eh, it's a bonny land, Hector, a bonny land."

There was silence for a minute and Hector MacAllister, who had had nothing to say all evening, rose to proceed to the business that had brought them together. Stepping carefully between the guests he went to the tall, pine cupboard and reached down a folded paper from

the top shelf. He returned to the bench by the fire and motioned to Watty. Watty with much unction delivered himself. He had been over at the English Block last week giving Long Angus MacDonald a day or two's chopping and while he was there Little Collins came in from the Front. The buddy was just hereaway, thereaway wandering Willie. He brought some letters that had been lying in the post office at the Portage for a year or more and there was one from Miles Hardy the miller. He wanted everyone in the MacDonald and the MacAllister settlements to know that there was to be an election next June and every man that wanted things made better was to come out and vote for Henderson. Gentleman Osborne was running on the Tory side, of course. Hardy had told Long Archie that if there were any folks living up this way that wanted roads or schools or a mill or a church now was their time to get out and vote against the man who wouldn't let the settlers have anything.

There were deep rumblings and nods of agreement, and the flashing of Red Sandy's eyes as he muttered something about the Honorable Commissioner of Crown Lands. And there was a paper, Watty went on, that Hardy said would tell them all about the disgraceful condition of affairs in the country. Hector carefully unrolled the white cloth in which it was wrapped. The newspaper was ragged and travel-stained. Miles Hardy had sent it to him months before but it had lain waiting at Old Rachel's tavern. It was a copy of the *Colonial Advocate* the paper pub-

lished by the man Mackenzie who was making so much trouble at the Capital. Hector unfolded the sheet and beckoned to Allister, "Read this," he said, indicating the editorial page.

Allister stepped shyly up to the light of the fire, hotly conscious that Red Gorry was muttering something about a gentleman and a scholar. Allister had read aloud before at such gatherings, as he was recognized as the best reader in the community next to the Master himself. But this was the first newspaper that he could remember having seen and the unfamiliar lines danced before him. But as he read on he forgot both friends and enemies. It was so easy to read, why it was far easier than Shakespeare or the Bible even. And the things it was saying fairly took the breath away. Here were set down the very subjects the MacAllisters discussed around their fires. Here were all their grievances written out in letters of fire. Here were expressed the very thoughts that had been seething unspoken in Allister's own heart. All the injustices that he and his family had suffered were here exposed in their shame to the gaze of all just men. The wrongs he had heard discussed in the smoke of many pipes were here revealed: Clergy reserves, Crown Lands, Estates, vast and wide, granted to the privileged classes who could do nothing with them. Why, the great outside world was concerned with what went on in the back clearings, then! The MacAllisters were not left alone in the bush! His father and mother had not been abandoned. This man Mackenzie had been their

champion all these years, and he was there still calling for justice for the farthest off settler in the backwoods of Upper Canada! The reader was not aware that his voice rang out to the stirring sentences, nor that bent backs were straightening and eyes flashing, till at the last ringing paragraph calling on all to come out and vote against this iniquitous system on the fifteenth of next June he was called to reality by Red Sandy flinging his lighter into the fire and shouting "Tod!"

And Uncle Peter who was the talkative one of the silent, Black MacAllisters brought his fist down upon the pine table and gave forth in Gaelic. "Yon's the man!" It was a great deal for a Black MacAllister to say, a perfect outburst of talk and for a few minutes everyone was silent.

"Mackenzie's the man all right!" Red Sandy's pipe was going furiously again. "He knows that it's the gentry that's ruinin' this country. Look at Gentleman Osborne's thousand acres! Gentleman Challoner's five hundred, and Squire Hadding's eight hundred! Losh! Ten years in the country and never a tree cut down! Yes, sir!" He knocked his pipe violently against the stones of the chimney. "Ten years and niver a tree cut down!"

"Never a tree!" Peter Black reiterated, and Teenie's husband repeated indignantly, "Never a tree!"

"Well, Now," Watty said in his high, slow "whinge," his face a settled melancholy. "A body mustn't be onreasonable with the gentry, ye mind. They say that Gentleman Osborne has to get some-

body to cut his nails, so how could you expect the poor buddy to cut down a tree? It's fair onreasonable."

The bent shoulders about the fire heaved with laughter. Watty regarded them all with deep solemnity tinged with reproach, and old Wully, who never understood what his younger brother meant, gazed in wonder and exclaimed, "Eh, tod! Man, isna that a caution?"

The joke had to be passed over to the group of women who had been absorbed in a discussion as to whether the time of the moon had any effect on soap-making. They left the subject and joined in the laughter. Though as Jane Ann remarked maybe it was no joke after all for the ways of the gentry were past guessing, the craters were that helpless.

Mrs. Sandy Red assured them Jane Ann was right. Wasn't her own cousin Matthew McKim, cousin on her mother's side, hired at Squire Hadding's, full cousin to Wully and Watty, too, as they could tell them. He had married an Irish lass that used to work for the Haddings, too. Yes, she was Irish, but not a Papist to be sure, though it was bad enough. This Bidsey, as they called her, was a clean, smart body. She had worked in Squire Hadding's place, that grand house at the Portage. They called it "The Birches." And Mat told her ye jist wouldn't believe how helpless the women-folk was. Squire Hadding's wife jist never did a hand's turn since she left the Old Country. She jist complained night and day about having to leave the old home, and she used

to cry like a baby at night when the owls began to hoot, whatever in the world for, Mrs. Sandy Red couldn't make out.

Allister crouched down on the floor behind Watty trying to read again the thrilling words. He forgot completely that he had intended to take Gorry Red out behind the shed and pay him for his sneers. He was completely carried away by the glowing sentences. He grew hot to the tips of his ears, then he shivered.

"Are ye cold, callant?" Watty asked turning towards him, "Here, get up by the fire."

But Allister paid no heed. He could not have explained in any case that he was both hot and cold and trembling with excitement.

"What's an election?" Little Johnny whispered at his elbow. Allister came back to earth and made a stern gesture for silence. Red Sandy was speaking again.

"They say this Mackenzie buddy is a rebel, and against the King. Well, I don't know. But Miles Hardy knows. And all I say is listen to him. Listen to Miles Hardy, I say, and that's what I've always said. Listen to Miles Hardy."

Allister looked anxiously at his Uncle Hector. He was sitting back against the log wall, his tall form erect, his great, leonine head outlined against the glowing fire. All eyes were turned towards him. He had not yet given his commands.

"This voting day, now," Watty said, "When is it?"

"June," said Peter. They all thought a while. They were waiting for the chief.

"June's a kinda hard time to leave things to the boys," said Jimmie, wondering if Teenie would forbid him to go. There was another silence. Everyone watched Hector. He spoke at last, quietly and casually.

"I think," said Hector MacAllister, "That the lads'll manage not so bad."

That was all; but every man sat a little straighter knowing that the great enterprise had been virtually undertaken, and that in the midst of their busiest season every man must leave his fields just as the clansmen left their sheilings at the summons of the chieftain for the MacAllisters had been commanded to muster to the voting for Miles Hardy's choice.

There was a great flutter and twitter in the corner remote from this momentous conference. Here the boys and girls were trying to get up a dance before Aunt Minnie had a chance to disapprove. Hughie was poking up old Angus from his seat by the fire and he was complaining fretfully. And there were nods and becks and wreathed smiles towards the bench all intended to bring Long Watty from his comfortable seat to call off.

"Be wise, bairns, be wise," Aunt Minnie said, seeing there was some frivolity afoot. "The time is short," she added ominously.

"That's jist the worry," whispered Jane Ann's Annie with a giggle. "If we don't hurry it'll be too short to have a dance."

They all made a dash at last and pushed back the table and hoisted the unwilling musician upon

it. Old Angus sawed away sulkily at his strings tuning and twisting. And now that everything was set for the dance even those who were most clamorous for it were seized with a panic of shyness. Red Sandy's Peter who was standing holding the hands of Jane Ann's Annie ready for the first steps backed up against the wall. And Aunt Minnie might step out and stop it any minute. Then Jane Ann saved the day. She caught hold of Betsy's oldest grandchild, a curly-haired laddie of three, and holding him by his chubby hands came hopping out onto the middle of the floor.

"Me and my fellow's goin' to have a dance anyhow!" she cried and the baby crowed with delight.

There was a shout of laughter from the young folk and under cover of Jane Ann's swirling skirts they swept out onto the floor. Watty balanced himself on the corner of the table beside the fiddler. Angus had played away his ill humor and was making the ears and feet tingle with the delightful lilt of *Money Musk*, and Watty's long drawl—"Alamain-left-and-away-ye-go! *Swing!*" left nothing in life to be desired.

Allister had never yet danced. He was afraid of all girls except Annie and Effie and of course they would not dance with him. But he looked up in astonishment to see that Little Johnny had left his side and was prancing heavily about with Red Sandy's Maggie's curls flying over his broad shoulder. Allister was filled with disgust at the sight of him and with some resentment, too. It seemed as if Little Johnny had become a traitor to their partnership, the unspoken but binding

covenant between them that what one did the other must do. And there was young Hughie, too, stepping it lively with one of Uncle Peter's girls. Allister drew nearer to his Uncle Hector. He felt old and wise and burdened with great matters in the midst of this youthful frivolity.

The older women were dodging about among the dancers trying to set the table for supper, but it was not till the revellers were out of breath, and Angus refused to play any more that any progress could be made. Then they all sat around the table, the young folk sitting on the floor and eating off a bench, and drank the strong tea made from dried mint leaves and ate scones and maple syrup and cake and preserves.

Even when everyone was filled and the tables cleared and the cups washed and put back on the shelves the company lingered, loath to leave. The shanty grew hot and stifling but it only made the contrast with the blast howling outside more agreeable.

Then Jane Ann and Katie struck up a song, and the company drew round the fire again and joined. Hector threw another log on the fire and the flames roared and snapped their defiance to the storm. They sang all the familiar Scottish songs; here and there a woman would take the alto, or a man come in harmoniously with a bass and always Long Willie Red's glorious voice dominated. They finished with *Ye Banks and Braes*, and Red Sandy's wife put her apron to her eyes, for her old home was by the Bonnie Doon.

Then Minnie started a hymn. Minnie had had

leanings towards the Methodists in the old land and knew many of their loveliest melodies. They all joined her in:

On the other side of Jordan,
In the sweet fields of Eden
Where the tree of life is blooming,
There is rest for you.

When the hymn was finished they all sat silent and expectant. Even young Gorry Red, the incorrigible, was quiet. No one ever left Hector MacAllister's hearth without the host offering a prayer for him. Katie brought him the old, leather-bound Bible that lay at Granny's elbow in the corner. Hector removed his cap which he had been wearing since he went out for the extra log for the fire. He read a psalm in Gaelic and his mother leaned forward drinking in the words, words that had been a stronghold to many a fearful heart in this strange land:

The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

Then Long Willie raised the tune of the psalm:

I to the hills will lift mine eyes
From whence doth come mine aid.

They caught it up, every voice, and slow, solemn and majestic it gathered force. The psalm marched up and on till it soared out beyond the four log walls of the little shanty and joined the mighty harmony of the winter storm and the wailing of the pines. And the new land was already conquered for here was an unshakable faith and a high courage that could not be moved.

To-night, kneeling on the bare floor and listening to his Uncle Hector's voice raised in prayer Allister could not give the heed his conscience demanded. New voices were calling him. Something stronger and more alluring than the fiddle had ever sung was ringing in his ears. A great shining road was opening out before him, the flaming sheets of the *Colonial Advocate* lighting up the way like a torch. And somewhere at the far upper end of the shining trail stood a tall figure, a white figure in a wide, dark doorway, a figure that beckoned imperiously.

CHAPTER VII.

HIS GRADUATION DAY

ALTHOUGH the pages of the *Colonial Advocate* called loudly to Allister to be up and away, strange to say they were the force that held him in school for the next few weeks. He managed to get possession of the precious newspaper, and took it with him to school the next day, buttoned carefully inside his homespun shirt, and, using his old, filled copy-book, he copied carefully and minutely between the lines every word of the glowing editorials. He had to keep a watchful eye upon McWhinnie meanwhile, but it happened to be one of the pleasant seasons when the Master was agreeably drunk, and discipline lax.

There was one paragraph that sang itself into his mind till he knew it by heart before he had time to set it down. It was a quotation from a great man named Robert Gourlay, who years before had been persecuted for standing up for the right: "Corruption has reached such a height in this province." . . . it began.

He wrote and re-wrote lists of great names that were becoming to him as the old Greek heroes of whom his mother used to tell. It was not Hector nor Achilles now but Mackenzie, Lount, Gibson, Gorham, Bidwell—he set them to the tune of *The*

Standard on the Braes o' Marr, and sang it and played the fiddle till Jane Ann screamed at him that he would deeve them all and to put away the fiddle or she would break it over his head.

When he had finished copying the best of the paper, and had committed to memory much of it, it had to be restored to Uncle Hector who was asking Uncle Johnny for it. But Watty Fraser brought news of another copy of the same newspaper that was being passed around the Red Mac-Allister settlement. Allister made many excursions to Watty's shanty before at last he came home in triumph with the treasure inside his shirt and that evening sat silent and absorbed while he transcribed the precious words into Little Johnny's old copy book.

Jane Ann could not but express the wonder that always beset her that he could be so noisy and troublesome, so idle and shiftless at times and so diligent and attentive when the task suited him. Even Uncle Johnny was moved out of his silence to comment on it.

"Man," he declared to his wife as he covered the fire after the young folk and Angus had gone up to the loft to their beds, "Man, when he gets hold o' something he wants he sticks to it like a pup to a root!" which was an amazingly long speech.

When the glow of the fiery words began to fade somewhat Allister found the restrictions of school still harder to bear. Something was calling him to be up and away. Away beyond the ring of the little clearing that bound the school-shanty mighty deeds were being done. A great task was

waiting him while he wasted his time in childish pursuits under the low roof where MacWhinnie thrashed and scolded.

School was even a lesser burden than the fear that grew more menacing as the winter wore away, the dread certainty that Uncle Hector was going to take him and Little Johnny to the Far Clearing. Little Johnny was very much pleased with the prospect, and had been showing signs all winter of asking Red Sandy's Maggie to accompany him. They would have grand times there, the three of them, Little Johnny declared, but Allister would not listen. The thought of Little Johnny marrying was almost as distasteful to him as the prospect of going back to his old home himself.

It was a long and bitter winter in that land of severe winters and old Angus, crouching over the fire, was visibly growing weaker. One evening when he was feeling feebler than usual, chiefly because Jane Ann had refused him an extra nip from the bottle, he called Allister to his bedside in the loft and saying he would never play again committed to his hands his one treasure. It was given with one condition. Allister must not remove it from the shanty so long as Angus was living.

Possession gave the fiddle an added charm and he played all the gay airs he knew. He even strung some wild melodies together which he called, *The Mighty MacAllisters*, that set little Maggie whirling about the room in glee.

There was a look of daring and rebellion in his eyes that set Jane Ann worrying.

"Yer Uncle Hector was here the day," she warned, "He'll be planning to get over to the Far Clearing before the crust melts."

Allister came over to her corner, his fiddle under his arm. "I don't want to go to the Far Clearing, Aunt Jenann," he declared towering above her rebelliously.

Jane Ann stared up at him. It was the first time she had heard any of the younger generation in open revolt and that against Hector!

"Ye wastrel!" she cried, "D'ye mean to tell me ye'd throw away all that clearing. . . ."

His black eyes were dancing, "Wouldn't you like me to go to the Front, Aunt Jenann? I'd buy you a shawl—a silk shawl with flowers." . . .

"Aw, tuts, ye daft loon," she cried shoving him away, "Ye'll get some o' the nonsense taken out o' ye when ye get ploughin' up the Far Clearin'."

He pulled her apron-string. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Aunt Jenann. I'm going to the Front. Yes I am. To the Portage." She stared at him in such dismay that he dropped his serious air. "Yes siree, I am. And the first thing I'll take my axe and I'll make Gentleman Osborne and all his crew cut a road straight from the Portage to the MacAllister settlement. I'll make it come right up to our door here, and you can walk into the village with your butter and eggs. I'll make a windrow, miles long," he cried, seeing the boys were listening. "You'll wake up some morning and hear an awful crash and that will be the last

tree falling. It'll be the big rock elm at the spring and it'll be the last tree in my windrow."

The young folks were shouting with laughter and Jane Ann's face lightened. It was only his nonsense after all and she turned to her wheel relieved. "Aw, ye'll jist be nothing but a wee fiddler!" she taunted.

Jane Ann had a marvellous power of intonation. She could express anything with the word "wee" alone; tender love and pity such as when she bound up little Maggie's "Wee cut finger," mild ridicule when she announced that Effie had "a wee beau comin' to see her." But she sounded the depths of biting sarcasm when she accused Allister, the boy who was to be a greater scholar than his father even, of descending to be nothing more than "a wee fiddler."

Her attitude did more than she dreamed in causing the instrument to lose much of its glamour.

But she could not but be uneasy, and would be till she saw him and Little Johnny settled on Allister's land. For no one knew what he might be up to.

But late in the winter there came an event in the settlement that drove Allister's immediate affairs even out of Hector's mind. Great rumors had been filtering through the settlements all winter that the huge Osborne estates that hemmed in the MacAllisters were about to be opened out at last.

Early in the winter, surveyors came through the rough bush trail from the English Block. One of them was Pierson, Osborne's agent at the

Portage. They were a very grand looking pair of gentlemen indeed with their fur trimmed coats, and as Teenie's place was the finest in the settlement they were taken to her.

Betsy came over to Jane Ann's the next week to see old Angus and brought all the news of the great visit. The gentleman had talked very freely. It seemed that these new settlers were to be brought out by Gentleman Osborne himself and his friends. They were to be settled on five-acre lots, though how a man could live on five acres of bush land nobody had yet explained. The country was going to the dogs, Pierson explained, chiefly owing to the evil influence of Miles Hardy, the miller, at the Portage. So Captain Osborne was going to see to it that his land was filled with the right kind of settlers; good loyalists, staunch supporters of King William, and no rebels need apply. And they were being placed on the lots right bordering on the MacAllister Settlement!

Watty Fraser brought the next budget of news. The new settlers were at the Portage, scores of them. They were all naygurs, he had heard, or Jews, he was not sure which. Not one of them knew the head of an axe from the handle, Archie MacDonald told him, but that didn't matter to Gentleman Osborne so long as they knew how to vote.

The next rumor was that they were Irish and Papists, and there was real consternation among the MacAllisters. Dougald Red, who always lead in prayer at the Sabbath services, left no doubt in the worshippers' minds on the

next Sabbath as to whom he meant when he beseeched the Almighty to forbid that there should come among them any such tribes as the Hittites, the Amorites or the Jebuzites to corrupt their children with Popery and such-like heathen superstitions.

The stalwart young son of the MacDonalds who was keeping a winter road broken to that part of the MacAllister settlement where Teenie's Teenie Ellen with the red-gold curls lived, was the next who brought news of the invading army. Watty went through the settlement with it like a fire through the chopping on a dry day in Autumn.

They weren't Irish after all but quite as bad. They were English! Likely the offscourings of the streets of London. It was quite true that the poor creatures were to be settled on but five acres of land. But they had been granted their patents right away before they had even cut a switch, so that they would all be ready to vote for Gentleman Osborne next June!

It seemed as if this last were true and the MacAllisters were filled with righteous indignation. And on the next Sabbath Dougald Red echoed the desires of all the congregation when he prayed that the Gibeonites, who were wrongfully laying claim to the Promised Land should be confounded, and ended with the stern petition that they might become hewers of wood and drawers of water to the Lord's chosen people.

When Watty Fraser got out of earshot of Hector as they ploughed homeward through the snow he announced in his high melancholy drawl

that from what he had heard of these Gibeonites even the Almighty Himself couldn't make hewers of wood out of them.

It was tacitly decided that the MacAllisters would have nothing to do with these minions of Gentleman Osborne who were given their title to the land for their vote. Let them look after themselves.

But Jimmie MacAllister's clearing was on the south-eastern frontier of the settlement next to where the invaders were about to settle, and one morning when he was cutting, away back in his uncleared land, he heard the intermittent sounds of an axe and went on into the wilderness to investigate.

He found three bewildered, half-frozen men, doggedly floundering with their axes about their first tree, and taking possession of them he marched them straight to Hector's shanty. Hector always dealt with every tough problem of the settlement and here was something to challenge his powers.

"They're jist nothing but Babes in the Woods," Jimmie explained to his brother in the byre, having left the strangers at the shanty under the ministrations of Minnie and Katie. "Nothing but Babes in the Woods!" he declared, and talking such outlandish gibberish that he didn't see how they could even understand each other with their aiches all in the wrong places.

These new invaders had been enemies, the tools of Gentleman Osborne before they arrived, but the moment they crossed Hector MacAllister's thresh-

hold in trouble they became neighbors and the whole settlement was at their service. One of the brothers had his ears badly frost-bitten, another had his toes frozen and the third had cut his foot with the axe, and Jimmie despatched his youngest across the bush to bring Betsy. They were warmed and fed and nursed. Minnie spread her best feather bed for them in the warm corner of the loft and they were bidden to stay until their own home was ready.

The next day Allister and Little Johnny were kept from school to go through the settlement and summon all the men to a chopping bee for the newcomers, while Watty Fraser crossed the Big Crick to call the Red MacAllisters. Watty gave a picturesque demonstration at each shanty of the Smith brothers trying to chop down a tree, taking in turn the part of the helpless, floundering axeman and the equally helpless instructors, shouting directions in an unbelievable jargon. It was all given in Watty's best funereal manner, and not one of the Red MacAllisters would have missed the bee for the price of a steer.

As the newcomer's land was next to Jimmie's, and as Teenie was chieftainess by divine right of the MacAllister women, she decreed that the supper should be served at her home and summoned all the women of both clans to a day of colossal baking.

Allister and Little Johnny had one day's reprieve from school to issue the invitations for the bee, and they were to have another on the

great day itself for the young lads were the best axemen of the settlement.

There was just one more school day in the week as it was Friday, and Little Johnny was for staying home, for the bee was on Monday and he was not expecting to go back to school any more, for the winter term was closing. But Allister commanded and implored. Just this one day and he would trouble him no more. So together they trudged away for what proved, indeed, their last day in school, for Allister solved the problem that was tormenting him by getting himself expelled.

The little shanty which the MacAllisters had reared for a school and place of worship, when they had barely covering for their own heads did not show by its appearance just what a great achievement it was. Allister and Little Johnny and many another winter pupil had to stoop their heads as they entered. There was but one door, and the end of the shanty opposite was almost filled with a huge fire-place into which it was the duty of the boys to roll a log and stir up a fire as soon as they arrived in the morning.

A few of the Red MacAllisters had already arrived when the boys entered, all talking about the new-comers and the bee to which the older ones were all going. Some of the older girls were there, shivering over the fire and casting bright glances across the room. For the big boys were all still at school for the winter and there was much courting going on under MacWhinnie's unconscious nose.

The Master came darting silently into the room in his moccasins, as was his way, always in the hopes of catching someone in mischief and quite often receiving his reward.

The benches were made of split logs, the flat side uppermost, with pegs driven into the round side to serve as legs. The rough desks against the low wall were constructed in like fashion. It was a great achievement to knock over one of these forms when the Master was not looking, for the fall rocked the shanty, as did the retribution that followed should the culprit be discovered. The pupils sat on the rough benches ranged across the room except when they went to the desks along the wall to write in their copy-books. Those who wrote sat with their backs to the room and were at a decided disadvantage, for the Master was in the habit of stalking silently up and down between the benches and woe to the one who dared to turn to see where he was. He always carried his tawse in his hip pocket and drew it out like a sword upon the slightest excuse.

He was a tall man but his swift, silent movements gave him the appearance of a panther as he stalked up and down between the desks. Then the whole school took on the atmosphere of the jungle, the smaller animals watchful and fearful, the stronger waiting for an opportunity to put out a swift claw. MacWhinnie well knew that he dared not turn his back upon the pupils, for the MacAllister school was no kindergarten.

He spent the most of his time thrashing the big boys and in the intervals sat at his desk fashioning

pen points from goose-quills or brewing ink from the sap of the Red Maple, the only departments of his profession at which he was adept.

The school relaxed and had a good time when he was wrestling with the complicated book-keeping of the school system. There was no money in the MacAllister settement and the teacher was paid in kind which was on the whole fortunate, for had the Master been paid in the coin of the realm he would surely have journeyed across the bush and left it all at Old Rachel's tavern in the English Block.

But he was paid in whatever the little settlement produced, and his long yellow, carefully ruled book held some strange and complicated book-keeping. Many pages showed some such items as:

January 12th, 1836,

James Archibald Red MacAllister Cr.

By 25 lbs. pork @ 2 Pence, Ha'penny the
lb. (Five children).

Or again:

Peter (Black) MacAllister and son Cr.

By One day's raising (Seven children).

Each parent had to pay the equivalent of ten shillings a term, and when it was paid in pork and labour it took all MacWhinnie's knowledge of mathematics to see that he was not cheated.

When the problem ran into pounds, shillings and pence he often had to call upon Allister. But the call for help was always put in the form of a punishment.

"Here you, Sandy Johnny!" he would shout, "Idling your time away as usual. Come up here and do this figgerin', and if you don't get the right answer I'll whale the hide off you!"

The wily Allister well knew that the Master did not know the right answer and came willingly enough, partly because he found the problems helped to beguile the long deadly hours of school when he had nothing to do. For he had long learned all McWhinnie was capable of imparting. Indeed he often caught the old fellow in mistakes and had had the temerity to point them out before the whole school on more than one occasion, and was soundly thrashed for his impudence.

During the brief half-hour at noon when the Master went down to his own nearby shanty for his mid-day meal there was high carnival. There had been bloody games of shinney in the rough little pond behind the school but as there had been so many broken heads the Master had lately forbidden it and there was now nothing to work off the dangerous high spirits of the bigger pupils.

So on this day, which was destined to be his last in school, Allister was looking about for some new form of mischief. There had been a fire coming out of the chimney the day before and the Master had put a pole up through the hole in the rough beamed ceiling and sent two of the biggest boys up to the loft to investigate. When they came down and the school settled again to its routine the Master ordered the pole removed and sternly forbade anyone going aloft. Hitherto no one had thought of scrambling up the dark hole but at

this prohibition the place became as alluring as though the Golden Fleece hung in its cobwebbed corners.

So as soon as the Master's back was turned at noon, Allister and Archie Peter and a half-dozen others swarmed up the pole and shouted down that there was a heap of gold buried under the straw. A storming party headed by Allister's arch-enemy, Gorry Red, was hastily organized. The besieged garrison gallantly held the aperture and the school was filled with dust and uproar.

In the midst of it the sentry who was always on duty gave his warning whistle. The Master was coming up the path on the run as usual. The besiegers hastily swarmed down the pole helter skelter. But only one could get through at a time and the two earlier explorers were left above. They succeeded in hastily pulling up their draw-bridge just before the Master burst into the room.

The school assembled, the atmosphere highly charged. But no one even glanced towards the opening in the ceiling. MacAllister school was too alert to make any such mistakes. There was nothing for the two prisoners but to wait till school was over and they ducked their heads in the straw to stifle their laughter.

There was just one danger, and a real one. The Master might miss them. And as Allister was in the habit of making himself rather conspicuous the danger in his case was more acute. But the school fell into its regular routine. Classes were called to the front, pencils squeaked across slates, thrashings were administered. The big boys put

another log on the fire, the girls tip-toed to the water-pail for a drink.

They might have escaped unnoticed, but a whole afternoon of inactivity was a physical impossibility for Allister. Under cover of the noise of a specially heavy whaling given to one of the biggest boys for not knowing his spelling, he crept to a place where a wide crack in the rough flooring of poles gave a view of Gorry Red bending over his copy-book. Allister reached out under the eaves and took a handful of snow that had drifted in. Archie Peter was more cautious and he whispered a warning, but too late. Allister let fall a large blob of melting snow on the back of his enemy's neck.

Gorry Red gave a loud artless, "Hooch!" and grabbing the back of his neck looked up. Fortunately the Master was engaged at the other end of the room in making Long Willie's Willie learn his spellings with the spelling-book on the floor before him, while he balanced himself on his hands and one foot, painfully holding the other foot aloft. Whenever the foot descended so did the tawse. The Master's facility in inventing new forms of torture amounted almost to genius.

Encouraged by his success, Allister went on to another enterprise. Several drops of melting snow descended from above eliciting rumbling threats of vengeance from the victims and much suppressed laughter from their neighbors. In spite of his companion's warnings Allister moved on to new conquests. Archie was keeping a lookout from the opening, and signalling when the

Master had his back turned, but now he whispered to Allister to be still. MacWhinnie was hereaway thereaway like a dog at a fair and he couldn't see him at all just at present. But Allister was reckless with joy. He had discovered that a large snowball held tight in his hand and allowed to drip water was the best weapon, and disregarding his sentinel's warnings and miscalculating the distance, he let fall a big splotch of water right on the open page of Hughie's copy-book. And just at the moment when the Master was examining it from behind.

The Master gave a snort of rage. "What's that?" he demanded. "I think it will be water," ventured Hughie shaking with fearful mirth. Sandy Peter sitting next said with marvellous presence of mind, "It's thawin'."

But this did not prove as brilliant a remark as at first appeared. For the one little window was deeply furred with a heavy March frost. The Master glared at him, suspicion in his eye.

"Thawin!" he roared, reaching under his coat-tails for his tawse. "I'll lick the thawin' outo' you, Sandy Peter, when I'm through with this. Whatever it is you know it's not thawin'!" He looked up and a joyous madness seized the adventurer looking down. He dropped a large splash of water and snow right into the Master's eyes. MacWhinnie ducked and clapped his hands to his face and the whole school burst into joyous uproar, and the law-breaker above lay in the straw and experienced a moment of fierce and perfect ecstasy.

The Master's watery eyes glared around the school and silence fell. He leaped to the opening in the loft. "Who's up there?" he demanded. There was deathly stillness both above and below.

"Ye needn't think I don't know who you are!" he raved, "Come down out o' that or I'll skin ye alive!"

MacWhinnie had a strain of unconfessed Irish from his Mother's side of the family and it appeared in this emergency.

"Come down out o' that," he roared, "All o' ye, or I'll break the back o' the first one that comes down!"

The school burst into another uproar of laughter. The Master whirled upon them but instantly everyone was sitting in demure silence and Willie's Willie hastily resumed his difficult position which he had relaxed during the Master's welcome blindness.

MacWhinnie grew pale with rage. "Who's up there. Answer me!" he roared. Pointing his long terrible finger at the boy at the seat next the door he shouted, "Robbie Donald, do you know who's up in the loft?"

"No, sir," came promptly from the young man who had been the last in the tumultuous descent from above. Lying to the Master was not considered a sin in the MacAllister school ethics. Just as the public conscience adjusted itself to new codes in war time so with the MacAllister school which was always in a state of war.

Allister and his fellow-prisoner, lying above listening to the short sharp denials of their loyal

friends, peered at each other in the dusk and each whispered the fatal name, "Betsy Peter." If she were present there was no hope. Betsy always told. They lay and waited. They knew the Master dared not leave the jungle behind him long enough to ascend, and if he did not compel some of the younger ones to tell, or if Betsy was not present, they would just have to stand a siege.

Suddenly they noticed McWhinnie pause in his questioning. He had come to the place where Allister always sat, and memory was awakening. There was big broad-shouldered Peter Johnny Red, and next him Allister's foster-brother, Little Johnny. The boys were sitting close together to efface any impression that there might ever have been anyone between them, but it was useless. MacWhinnie stabbed the air in the direction of Little Johnny. His blood-shot eyes blazed.

"Where's Sandy?" he shot forth.

"I'll not know," said Little Johnny sullenly.

"He was here this morning!" shouted the man triumphantly.

No reply.

"Wasn't he here this morning?" thundered the Master.

"I'll not know," Little Johnny repeated stubbornly.

"I'll not know. I'll not know," mimicked the man furiously. "I'll teach you to know." He reached for the sword in its scabbard. "You always were an unteachable dunce, you thick-headed dolt, you, Johnny's Johnny, but I'll make you know where Sandy is." He caught him by

the back of the neck and dragged him out into the middle of the room.

Little Johnny was a quiet, peaceable, over-grown lad who never got into trouble himself. But he was a slow, plodding draught horse hitched to a capering colt and his position as Jonathan to Allister's David was a difficult one. The furious man dragged him across the floor.

When McWhinnie was in a real rage he was beside himself. He caught the boy by the throat, and tore his strong home-spun shirt off his shoulders and began to rain blows upon Little Johnny's bare back. Blood began to trickle down and the school grew suddenly silent with dismay and up in the loft, not sure of what was going on, Allister heard Red Sandy's Maggie give a cry of terror.

The next moment it seemed as if the ceiling of the school-house had fallen in. Allister descended with a bundle of straw and a blinding storm of dust right on top of the Master's back, and clung to him as if he had been made of glue. No one was ever quite sure of what happened next, only that there was a terrible whirlwind of dust and straw and boys with the Master in the centre. All the boys who had a grudge against the Master waited to get in a few blows but the younger children and the girls grabbed their coats and fled in terror. And before the smoke of the battle had cleared away, Allister and Little Johnny were far down the forest trail, having graduated in a rather tumultuous fashion from school.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WINDROW

NO one in MacAllister school, with the exception of Betsy Peter, ever carried home tales, and this time even she remained silent terrorized by threats from her brother. Fortunately the next day was Saturday and Allister had two days in which to work out this most knotty problem that MacWhinnie had ever given him. Little Johnny's case was simple. He was to remain at home after this week anyway. But how was Allister to explain to his Uncle Hector that he could not go back to school, even if MacWhinnie did not tell. He had his doubts that MacWhinnie would tell. The story that the boys fled from school was not one that the pioneer fathers would likely receive with anything but derision.

Allister went to church the following Sabbath with the problem still unsolved.

Some hints that Neil's Sandy had had a row with the Master had leaked out and were discussed at the Sabbath service. But it was not safe to speak to Hector of secular things on the Sabbath day. Anyone who walked to or from the service with him spoke of the sermon or some kindred

subject. Watty Fraser, being a light-headed body, was the only one who would have brought up the subject. As he came down his path from his clearing with his brother and joined the procession on its way to the school-house he merely said, "That colt o' Neil's don't seem to step in the harness very easy like."

Hector made no reply, and no one had the courage to pursue such a frivolous subject. But when the Sabbath evening had come he walked over to his brother's clearing.

"What have the lads been doing at school?" he asked sternly.

Johnny looked bewildered. He had not heard even rumors of the great battle.

"Jenann didn't say anything," he ventured, laying the responsibility where it belonged.

Hector's face grew sterner. He had always feared that Johnny and Jane Ann were no fit guides for their own offspring let alone a fatherless lad who needed a strong hand over him. The boys were at the stable doing the evening chores. They were questioned. Little Johnny was silent. Allister was diplomatic, and very innocent.

Had the Master given him a licking?

"No," Allister answered truthfully. "Not yesterday."

Had he licked Little Johnny? Little Johnny admitted he had. What for?

"Because he couldn't answer the Master's questions," Allister interposed.

Hector said no more, but bided his time and Allister breathing freely again knew that the bolt

had merely been stayed for a time and was sure it would fall upon him soon and what would happen to him?

But McWhinnie's probable vengeance did not weigh long on Allister's mind for he had been trusted with a great responsibility for the bee. He was to see that the fiddle got to Teenie's house, either with or without Angus. Old Angus, of course, could not leave the fire-side and he was loath to let his treasure depart. But by this time the old man was willing to sell his birthright for an extra drop of the bottle. His eyes grew cunning.

"If she'll be bringing her a bottle, jist a wee bottle of the crater," he whined, "She'll be letting her haf to fiddle for neffermore."

Allister promised. He had some doubts about his ability to secure a whole bottle of whiskey but such a chance could not be missed. There was just a little danger that the Gibeonites, not knowing the custom of the country, and being in a fashion the guests of the MacAllisters, might fail to furnish the Grog Boss with the usual cheer. The settlement remembered yet with embarrassment the one occasion when the jar was missing. It was at a logging at Teenie's. Jimmie had shown a decided weakness for the jar in his younger days, and Teenie had arisen in her might and banned it from their bee. The Black MacAllisters felt the disgrace deeply, the whole family was involved, but they stood loyally by their brother. But the Reds were for going right back beyond the Big Crick without raising a cant-hook.

Only Hector's influence saved the day and kept them all at their thirsty task. The sharp lesson cured Jimmie of his weakness, but even Teenie had not the courage to repeat the social blunder. There came a day when the Grog Jar became a menace to the community and had to be banished but as yet it was an important feature of all gatherings. Allister felt that surely Watty Fraser would see that it did not fail, and that the fiddle was duly paid for.

Even while the dawn was beginning to illuminate the grey forest aisles with rose and gold, the neighbors had begun to gather. It had been a severe winter and though it was drawing to a close the forest was still choked with mountains of snow. The stumps along the winding, dipping roads wore great shining turbans. The narrow forest trail, winding from side to side to avoid these depleted monarchs, was walled on either side with drooping evergreens, weighted down under their priceless mantles, and bending sorrowfully before their slaughtered brethren.

The Black MacAllisters had not all yet arrived when the first ox-sleigh from the Red settlement came floundering through the drifts, like a little ship in a high sea, now climbing the smoking billows, now sliding down into the trough of the waves.

Teenie called a welcome to one and all as she hurried in and out to the summer cook-house where the fire had been lit also for the extra pots that must be kept boiling. She ushered the women into her home while the men, their axes

over their shoulders, went ploughing through the snow to the scene of the chopping.

Teenie had had all her family at work by candle-light and was ready for the great campaign. She was very happy. For had she not the best house in the settlement with a but and a ben, and lately a fine kist of new quilts and hook-mats to be displayed, the hope-chest of Teenie Ellen whose red-gold curls had lured young MacDonald across the Barrier.

"Come away! Come away!" Teenie called heartily as she hurried from fire to fire. "Come away, Kirsty, woman! Eh but it's that kind o' ye all! Eh, man, and yon's Granny! Did ye ever? Come away Minnie! Is yon you, Katie? Come away, and get warmed. Eh, Jenann, and is yon yersell, forebye?"

Teenie and Jane Ann were the only Lowlanders in a colony of Gaelic-speaking women, and when they were together they fell into the depths of their home dialect, where their sisters could not follow. Old Wully Fraser, who had come from the Clydeside also, said it was worth a walk across the bush just to hear Teenie and Jane Ann having a crack.

Everyone was shown into the inner sanctuary, a place called, "the Room," which had been added to the original shanty. It was a marvellous place with a half-dozen bright hooked mats on the floor round which everyone stepped carefully, a billowing feather bed with a white crocheted spread, and a great chest of drawers brought by Teenie's unconquerable determination all the way from

Glasgow. But the greatest treasure of "the Room," and the thing all the girls were impatient to see, was hanging on the wall above the big kist—the only mirror in the settlement.

The girls gave it shy and longing glances as they removed their hoods and shawls but no one was bold enough to go right up and look into it until Jane Ann entered.

"Eh, Teenie," she cried, "I've jist been ettelin' to get a look at myself again. It's that long since I was here I've clean forgot what I look like." She gazed curiously at her comely round face, adding complacently, "and I'm not so bad after all!"

Under cover of the laughter the girls crowded about the great revealer, and there was much fixing of curls and crimps. But Teenie gave them little time for such vanities. Under her capable management everyone was set to work at once.

The first task was to prepare the noon-day meal, which was to be sent out to the bush, it being too far for the men to come to the house. The afternoon was to be devoted to the preparing of a colossal supper to be served when the choppers returned.

So the log shanty rang with a great clatter of dishes and tongues.

"And how's Neil's boy, Jenann?" asked Mrs. Sandy Red, who was arranging potatoes in the ashes to bake.

"Sandy's fine," Jane Ann said with some inner misgivings. "He came over with Johnny and the boys."

"What's Hector goin' to do with him, when he's through school?" asked another woman from beyond the Crick. "Our Robbie says he's great at the learnin' but the Master gives him a lacin' near every day."

"Oh, there aint many that MacWhinnie don't give a lacin' to," said Jane Ann, ready to defend her child, "He don't miss many, that fellow."

"Indeed I'm afraid Sandy'll be needin' the tawse," Minnie said mournfully. "The lad's not got the root o' the matter in him," she added looking reproachfully at Jane Ann. "Hector's goin' to take him back to his own clearin' in the spring."

Jane Ann had other ideas but she made no comment.

"He'll have to be lookin' round for a wife, then," said Mrs. Sandy Red, who had seven girls.

"Sandy's never looked at a girl yet," Jane Ann said with some satisfaction, "Nor Little Johnny, neither," she added with rather less assurance.

"Well, the girls has been lookin' at Sandy all right, then," cried Betsy, "Our girls says that Aggie Dougal' is always chasin' him at school."

Jane Ann's rosy face grew grave. This was indeed a new terror. There were two lads coming across the Big Creek to see Effie and Annie, which was as it should be and everything was under her eye. But when the boys started running out at nights after other girls, and Sandy with that fiddle, she would surely be falling upon evil days.

"It's queer that none o' Dougal's girls is mar-

ried yet," Mrs. Sandy Red was remarking, after assuring herself there were none of the family present. "Annie must be gettin' on."

"Let's see." Kirsty Duncan suspended her knife above the pail of dried apples in her fat lap, and considered. "Willie was the baby when they came out and there was Maggie between him and Annie."

"No, Findlay was the baby," called Betsy Black, who was placing the Dutch oven over the coals. "Willie was a big lump of a lad runnin' round when they crossed."

"Eh, mercy, ye're right, Betsy," cried the other woman, Betsy being the recognized authority in both settlements on the subject of babies. "Ye're right, to be sure. Annie's a lot older than I thought she was. That'll make her—let me see..."

"Annie's next to Maggie, and Maggie's jist the same age all but three weeks as our Duncan," Teenie contributed this as she made a swift excursion to the door for the home-made broom to sweep up the ashes Betsy had scattered on her immaculate hearth. "And Duncan'll be twenty-two the fourteenth of next May," she added as she returned the broom to its corner behind the door.

"Maggie's jist about twenty-two, then!" cried Kirsty Duncan, "Well, that'll make Annie twenty-four. There was jist two years to the very month between all o' Jessie's children. I mind that. Annie's gettin' on. Goin' on twenty-five. My! It's time she was gettin' married if she's ever goin' to."

Granny MacAllister who was sitting in the

chimney corner smoking her clay pipe, her bright bird-like eyes taking in everything, demanded to know what it was all about. When Katie had shouted the problem of Annie's age to her she made her authoritative statement. She gave Annie's and Maggie's ages, and the date and hour of their birth. Wasn't she with Jessie the night Annie was born? Jessie always had a hard time and they were afraid she wouldn't come through, for the dog had been howling under her window the night before. Granny went into a long detailed description of the event in an undertone to Betsy, and Teenie, coming in, swept all the small wide-eyed listeners away, bidding them be off to the byre and bring the pail that was used for the calves' feed.

"Annie Dougal's twenty-four, then, goin, on twenty-five! And she hasn't got a fellow yet!" cried Nellie Duncan, aged seventeen. "Well, my grief! She'll be an old maid if she don't look out."

Katie MacAllister, the only old maid of the community, was skimming the pot of boiling pork, her mouth held very tight. Jane Ann looked at her and turned the talk into laughter.

"Well," she cried, slicing a great pink ham, swiftly and efficiently. "It must be clean fearsome to be that old. I'm glad I'm a lot younger. I'm jist goin' on fifteen, myself, as ye all know."

The food was piled in boxes and baskets on hand-sleighs and the lads who were too young to work in the bush but had been allowed to come to the bee to run errands, were despatched, very

proud, with the generous meal to the scene of the chopping.

"Horo, girls," cried Teenie's Johnny who was old enough to appreciate feminine company. "Hurrah! out to the bush and see the choppin'."

"Oh, let's go," cried Jane Ann's Annie, and Teenie Ellen seconded her, each knowing that her sweetheart was out there swinging his axe with no one to admire him. They ran to their mothers. Couldn't they go out to the bush with the little boys to see they didn't spill anything?

The suggestion was sternly put down. Aunt Minnie was scandalized. Was it a modest thing for big girls to go trailing off to the bush with a lot o' men? Teenie declared. And they were sent back to their work with hanging heads.

Meanwhile out on the Gibeonite's land mighty deeds were being performed. The forest rang with the shouts and blows of the attacking army, and one by one the monarchs of the woods were falling before them. It was a mighty task to which Hector had summoned his men. The timber was all the hardest wood: maple, beech, birch and black ash, and an abundance of rock elm, splendid for building purposes but stubborn to the axe. Hector pointed out some of the most magnificent specimens to their owners, but the Smith brothers gazed up at them in helpless wonder.

The centre of all the activity was the place which Hector had picked out as the site for the new shanty, high and dry and not too far from the spring. A little to one side of the tiny clear-

ing which had already been made in a lean-to made of branches sat the Grog Boss. He was tending a great fire that roared before his little shelter. Over it hung a great cauldron of boiling tea.

Right in the centre of the site chosen for the new home a mighty giant specimen of the rock elm reared its splendid height—ninety feet into the gleaming winter sky. This monarch had reared his head above his fellows when Shakespeare wrote of tongues in trees, and there he still stood sturdy and straight the mighty trunk smooth and bare of limbs to a height of fifty feet. Hector measured its girth where the axes were to do their work and calculated that there would be seven feet of solid hard wood to be cut. It was then that Watty Fraser came forward with a bright suggestion. Let the best choppers at her. They would make the stump as smooth as satin, and there would be a fine round table and they could just raise the shanty over it.

Because the plan was delivered in Watty's heaviest melancholy most of the MacAllisters took it as a joke. But Hector considered. It wasn't a bad idea, he admitted. A table, seven feet across already made, was no mean piece of furniture. It could be done and he called a quartette of prize axe-men to the task.

These were not the older men. Though they were all skilled with the axe, the lads who had been brought up in the bush were far more adept than their fathers. As Watty explained, the cal-lants had been born with axes in their hands and

had never had to learn. In their young hands the axe had changed from a tool to an instrument of a fine art. Of all the artists with the pioneer weapon, Allister and Little Johnny and two of Red Sandy's boys were by far the most skilful. They were masterly in pairs when they stood up to a tree, but when the four of them gathered round a forest monarch to lay him low, it was a sight for the whole settlement.

Watty shouted for them. "Come away you, Sandy, and Johnny Johnny, and you two callants o' Sandy Red's. Come away and let's see what ye can do at makin' a table. Here's a lad'll beat ye!"

The four boys came running eagerly. They had stood up together at many a chopping bee and there was nothing could beat them. They ranged themselves round the great timber, slim lads, very puny and helpless they looked as the mighty monarch towered above them in indifferent majesty. Hector marked the place for cutting and at a word from Little Johnny who was the recognized leader they swung their axes against the stubborn wood. At first the blows were a little irregular but as the boys got into their swing they fell with perfect rhythm—one, two, three, four, as though timed by the beat of a military drum. Allister had taught them this regularity of beat. It was like playing the fiddle, or doing a step-dance. Regular, unswerving, timed to perfection: swing, blow; swing, blow; two to a second the axes fell and great chips flew back into a white circle behind the hewers.

It would be a long day's labour for one man to

bring down such a tree, four hours hard work for two men. Hector calculated that the boys would bring it to earth in less than two hours. He had always forbidden the grog jar to the younger lads of the settlement, keeping an especially strict eye upon Allister. So as the mighty monarch still stood, he sent one of the boys to the fire for a jug of tea. The quartette of choppers drank and rested and then sprang to their task again, eager to show their elders their mettle.

More than an hour and a half had gone by. The smooth satin level of the stump was as even as if planed by machinery. It had widened and the tapering stem of the central pillar was dangerously thin. Hector kept near, looking about carefully towards the side of the tree where it leaned, and warning everyone to get away. The men, who had left their tasks to cluster round and run an admiring hand across the satin level of the stump, were moving off to a safe distance. And still the axes swung in perfect time: swing, blow; swing, blow.

Hector had set the younger boys and the hosts of the bee to clearing paths in all directions away from the tree lest it fall away from its lean. The newcomers, still very stiff in the shoulders and awkward in the arms, were doing a little better with the shovel than the axe, but had been causing much merriment among their young associates. The paths had all been made and the Gibeonites stood in one waiting in wonder what might happen next.

The end was not far and everyone stopped work

and watched for it. Hector, his keen eyes aloft noticed a quiver run up to the mighty branches and called to the choppers. Two of the boys stepped back. Allister and Little Johnny each gave one more stroke on the side of the lean of the tree. At the last blow the tall pillar began to sway forward, there was a great rustling far up in the wide branches.

"Lads!" shouted Hector, "Away with ye!" The great monarch was shivering as if in the agony of dissolution. Allister gave one more blow, and leaped back from the possible recoil of the trunk. It came, a bang like the report of a gun, and Allister and Little Johnny were fleeing down one of the tunnelled paths shouting with excitement. On all sides men were retreating before the wrath of the falling monarch, leaping over logs and floundering through the snow. The huge timber swung forward with a mighty rush of wind. There was something almost like human despair in the terrible abandonment with which it flung forward. It came to earth with a thunderous crash that echoed far into the forest, its branches sending up a storm of snow. But a great burst of sunlight flooded the little clearing, the pigmies who had conquered flung up their caps and shouted and all ran forward to view the satin stump, which the boys were already levelling in the centre. It was another victory, the beginning of a new home wrested from the wilderness. And the conquerors crowded round the stump that was one day to be the table for the gathering of a new family of pioneers.

Old Wully Fraser, the weaver, had never acquired much skill with the axe and he lifted his red mittened hands in admiration.

"Eh, callants," he cried in his high, thin voice, "I'd be the greatest man in the township if I could swing an axe like you. But I doubt I did not learn young enough."

"We weren't born to it, Wully," Hector said.

"We'll never learn, 'Enry," said the elder of the Gibeonites gloomily. And their neighbors were too honest to give them any encouragement.

There arose joyous shouts from the outskirts of the chopping area and the little boys from the house with the hand-sleighs piled high with the welcome food were sighted coming out of the forest path. Every axeman dropped his work and hurried to the fire. The proud young quartette came in for a great deal of congratulation as everyone admired the table. Watty insisted upon sitting at it, and calling out his orders to an imaginary waiter as though he were in a tavern.

Young Gorry Red, who was Allister's rival, was no mean axeman himself, and he was sullen and jealous. He sat on the opposite side of the fire among his own following and sneered. "Gentleman Sandy can chop it seems," he declared, "I thought he always stayed home and washed the dishes for Aunt Jenann."

"Shut your mouth!" said Little Johnny, violently. It was a perfect stream of talk for the silent boy and Allister drew near to hear what it was all about.

"Shut your own mouth!" Red Gorry was advising with a foul word attached.

Allister had heard enough to convince him that his enemy needed his attention and as soon as the pangs of hunger were appeased he floundered through the snow to Gorry's side.

Allister inquired politely as to what ailed him. Had he a pain? Perhaps he hadn't had enough to eat. This was rather unkind as Gorry Red was famous for his enormous appetite even in a neighborhood of pioneer boys who ate like wolves. Gorry retreated grumbling but Allister followed. He made up a ditty about Gorry's appetite. He picked up a couple of chips and improvising a fiddle sang a song about it. About how Gorry's hunger could not be appeased. He ate and ate early and late. The settlement could not produce his mate. He wore out his axe cutting pork and bread, and even then he wasn't fed, but kept on eating till he dropped down dead!

Allister was always apt to overdo anything in the line of teasing. He was soon surrounded by a crowd of youngsters shouting with laughter, while Gorry's face grew darker and more sullen with rage. Fortunately the nonsense was interrupted and work was resumed. The enormous loads of food had been consumed in an incredibly short time. And even the roaring fire around which the men gathered could not keep them warm. Everyone was glad to get back to work. But there was a last visit to the Grog Boss before leaving and Allister slipped up to Watty with his request, the price of the fiddle for the dance. Watty secured

the prize from the Grog Boss. The flask was filled and Allister pocketed it keeping an eye on his uncle, and went off to his work whistling loudly.

He walked straight into trouble. Young Gorrry Red was showing his prowess to an admiring circle, the Smith brothers among them. He had chosen a hard maple and had boasted that he could drive his axe fifty times into the one gash, without stopping. Watty was counting for him and the performer was doing very well indeed. The axe fell with mathematical precision in exactly the same place each time, varying scarcely the fraction of an inch. When the fiftieth stroke was counted Gorrry stepped back and Watty called them all to run their hands over the scarves, they were as smooth as satin.

"Come on now," Watty shouted. "There's not a callant o' ye can beat that."

"I can," shouted Allister. "I'll drive my axe in a hundred times and the gash won't be any wider."

The tree was chosen and the contest began. There was no doubt that Allister was the better axeman. The implement crashed into the same narrow slit fifty, sixty times and still fell without the slightest deviation from the original mark.

A chorus of admiration was raising about him and Watty called, "Hey there, Gorrry, he's goin' to do it all right!" Gorrry Red could stand no more of this admiration of his rival. He took a step forward, pretended to stumble and fell against Allister just as the axe was coming down for the eightieth stroke. The blow went wild chipping off

a large section beneath the slit and spoiling the smooth surface.

Allister turned upon his enemy his axe uplifted, but with a yell of derision Gorry Red was off and away over the tangle of the clearing. Allister gave fierce chase but was stopped by warning shouts. The two boys were running right across the track of a tree that was leaning perilously for its fall. Gorry leaped past it while Allister stepped back and the two glared at each other like wildcats across the fallen timber. Then Allister was summoned by his Uncle Hector to come and bring Little Johnny for they were about to fell a windrow.

A gang of men had been preparing for hours for a great windrow. Eight huge trees had been selected, standing in a straight row. Each had been chopped half through on the side facing the next one. To make a windrow was to chop down the first tree so carefully that it would fall against the second which in turn would snap off and be flung over against the third and so on till the whole row came to earth. A windrow was a great achievement and one that only the most skilled woodsmen could accomplish. When they were almost ready, Jimmie Red, the most accomplished woodsman in the two settlements had sighted two more that he felt sure could be brought down also, and the men rushed to prepare them. They would attempt a mighty feat. Ten great trees in one tremendous slaughter!

All lesser trees surrounding the chosen victims had been cut down lest they interfere with the

progress of the fall, and at last when all was in readiness eight of the most skilful young choppers were lined up to draw lots as to who should have the honor of cutting down the initial tree.

The coveted lot fell to Allister and Peter's Willie, and Gorry Red drew back murder in his heart. "You cheated," he whispered to Allister as he passed him, and Allister had just time to mutter fiercely, "I'll make you take that back you ugly, red lobster!"

There was no time for any more. The two chosen axemen labored away at the great tree for an hour while the others went about their own tasks. But as the felling of the initial tree came near its completion, everyone left his work and drew near. It was always possible, no matter how careful the choppers, that the initial tree might not fall just right against the second. And even if it did others in line might fail to fall in the right direction. There was much speculation as the men gathered about, climbing fallen logs for a good view, and many bets as to how many trees would fall.

The big tree was almost down. The quiver of approaching death ran through its frame. There was a shout of warning, and the boys gave their last mighty blow. They leaped back to avoid the dangerous back swing and ran for safety along a fallen log. There was a breathless instant and then the great trunk broke with a terrific crack. There was a ripping, tearing noise of tangled branches above, and with a great rush of wind the monster swooped forward and came crashing

against the next in line. The second tree cracked off at the cut like the firing of a gun and flung forward with a mighty swing against the next. The third tree crashed and pitched itself upon the fourth. Away down the great avenue went the tremendous slaughter. Crash, thunder—crash, thunder—a colossal game of nine pins played by giants with a home for the stakes! The great timbers swung themselves forward in unerring line as if by command until the ninth tree had hurled itself against the tenth and the whole line of splendid monarchs lay prone on the earth. The thunder of their going reverberated far through the forest, the snow stormed up and blotted out the sight and all nature seemed to cry out against the devastation.

The MacAllisters threw up their caps and shouted and danced on the fallen logs. The newcomers standing afar off on a log stump to view the sight gazed in silent astonishment, and old Wully Fraser threw up his red-mittened hands and cried aloud, as though he were witnessing the dissolution of all earthly things: "The Lord be merciful to us!"

The Grog Boss came running with the jar. It was an occasion for great rejoicing. The clearing had been accomplished. The great piles of logs which the choppers had cut up were hauled into heaps and left for the burning except such as were needed for building. When the long shadows of the forest stretched across the clearing it resembled a scarred and confused battle-field. But it was a field of victory. The victorious army

shouldered their weapons and turned homeward. The newcomers, cold and weary, but warmed at heart floundered through the snow after them, their unaccustomed axes over their bowed shoulders. They were drooping with weariness and hunger and were chilled almost to freezing point, but their hearts were light. For this new and terrible task of making a home in this wilderness was not crushing them to earth any more. It had been lifted from their shoulders and spread over the broad backs of their neighbors and they were speechless with relief and gratitude.

Allister waited behind for young Gorry Red like a lover for a tryst. Little Johnny and the other boys of the Black clan kept close to him. If there was going to be a general fight nobody wanted to miss it. Keeping an eye out for interfering elders, the boys slipped away into a darkening hollow behind a clump of giant cedars. It was a bloody battle with the friends of each gladiator lined up on either side yelling for the blood of the other. It was still undecided, now one contestant now the other rolling about in the blood-stained snow with his enemy on the top of him, when Hector MacAllister arrived on the scene.

He had been the last to leave the clearing, and was driving away with his oxen when he stopped for a last look at the campfire. He was attracted by sound coming, not from the direction of the retreating groups of men, but from the other side of the clearing. He plunged across the tumbled devastation and burst upon the battle behind the cedars.

Hector MacAllister was a giant in height and strength and when his wrath was roused his strength was as the strength of ten. The boys fled before his terrible presence. He caught up young Gorry Red by the back of his neck and the seat of his homespun trousers and flung him afar into the snow where he vanished completely in the soft depths. He caught up his own lad in the same way, and shook him as a dog would shake a rat. And as he did so the bottle of whiskey fell from Allister's shirt pocket.

It was not the way of the pioneer fathers to question a youthful criminal. They executed first and if they took the trouble to question at all it was done later when their wrath was appeased. Allister had been thrashed many times before. It was impossible for a youth to grow to manhood in a pioneer settlement without feeling the heavy hand of the man that was set over him. But he had never had any experience like this. The wallopings he had received from old McWhinnie's tawse had always been attended with some mitigating glory. Uncle Johnny's rare castigations, too, were endurable because they had always been shared with the other boys. But this thrashing at the hands of the man who had stood for all that was best in the lad's life was different. Hitherto he and his Uncle Hector had met as man to man. They were partners. And now he had turned upon him without question of the right or wrong, and had used his mighty strength upon him because he was neither big enough nor strong enough

to hit back. It was shameful. He hated the man at that moment with a murderous hatred.

There was neither fiddler nor fiddle at the dance that night. Allister did not even appear at Teenie's for supper. Nobody seemed to know what had become of him, not even Little Johnny, who was moody and silent and slipped away early.

When the family returned home late that night Jane Ann found old Angus sitting by the fire, feeling very comfortable after his warming draught, but weeping feebly because he had been so weak as to give Sandy his fiddle to take away for evermore!

"Sandy!" cried Jane Ann with a great sinking of her heart, "Where's he gone?"

The old man handed her a torn leaf of Sandy's copy-book. It had some glowing words from the *Colonial Advocate* written on the other side. It was a brief note for Jane Ann. He could not live in the same settlement as his Uncle Hector any more. He was going away. He would come back some day and bring her shawl.

Jane Ann sank upon a stool and buried her face in her apron.

"Oh, Mary," she sobbed, "Mary! I couldn't hold him, I couldn't!"

CHAPTER IX.

FIRE WEED

CAPTAIN OSBORNE, owner and ruler of Osborne township, came riding slowly down the road from his home towards the village. He would have assured any enquirers that the only reason for his careful pace was the dangerous holes that the spring sunshine was making in the rough roads. He would have said it with some asperity, too. He knew that the countryside had always called him Gentleman Osborne, in a land that had a sure instinct for names. It pleased him that they did. But that the younger generation were beginning to call him Old Gentleman Osborne had recently come to his ears, and this displeased him mightily. Nevertheless he did not ride so jauntily nor sit so straight as he had done that June morning twelve years before when he had cantered to the shore to welcome his friends to the land of hope and fortune.

He had just returned from the Capital and his bare house, surrounded by his scant, stumpy fields, looked drearier than when he had left. It was spring, but a weeping, wailing spring as yet, the cold sullen spring that came reluctantly to the northern forests. Gusts of bitter wind set the

pine tops moaning above his gate way. Bursts of sunlight flashed over his snowy fields where the stumps were showing their ugly, bald heads, and made the grey landscape greyer as it vanished. And far up above the tops of the sighing pines, hidden by the low, grey curtains of the sky, sounded the clattering call of the wild geese, winging their way to still more northern waters.

Old Gentleman Osborne shivered under his warm, fur-trimmed coat.

"Hunting for something colder and drearier than this!" he muttered.

Spring had not yet unlocked the crystal gates of the Gala Water, but as he crossed the log bridge he saw the miller moving about the open doorway of the mill, getting ready for the day when the waters would come tumbling out of the forest and set his wheel turning.

Gentleman Osborne turned his back upon the mill and gazed out upon the ice-bound lake. Much water had surged under that bridge since the day he had built it. And all his great dreams of empire seemed to have flown under the bridge, too, and been lost in the tide. He who owned nearly half a county; and whose friends owned the other half, who was a close friend of the Governor of the Province, and who virtually held the fate of all the settlers of the county in his hands, he who had dreamed of founding a great estate in the wilderness had seen all his plans melt and disappear as the snow was melting and running off Gala Water bridge. And always it had seemed he had seen in each defeat the hand of that man who

was now standing inexorably in his doorway waiting for the forces of nature to come to his aid.

Each of the twelve years since he had ridden across that bridge to welcome his brother empire-builders had been a year of disaster. These vast estates which he had dreamed by this time would be converted into waving fields of grain, smiling pastures, and laden orchards peopled by happy tenants, had stubbornly remained in their primeval wildness. And this strong, hard-looking man standing silent in the mill door seemed to typify those immovable obstacles that held him in check.

This miller of the Gala Water was a breeder of discontent among the settlers, the man who by his secret machinations kept all possible tenants away from the great estates. A radical and a rebel at heart himself, he was a secret henchman of the malignant Mackenzie, that fire-brand of iniquity who was stirring up sedition at the Capital. Osborne's aristocrat's heart swelled with indignation as he contemplated the whole thankless, rebellious crew.

It was Hardy and his emissaries that had taken all the joy out of his late visit to the Capital. Osborne was the candidate for Osborne township in the coming election and one of the Mackenzie faction was running against him—a personal friend of the rebel Mackenzie himself. The Governor expected Osborne to save this seat. He had naturally looked for grapes from such a promising corner of his vineyard and had not been able to hide his chagrin when it had brought forth such a

bitter crop of Canadian thistles as the miller of Gala Water and his large rebellious following.

And now Osborne was facing the election in June, hardly knowing how to meet the tremendous expense which alone would promise victory. His friends at the Portage were even poorer than he, and friends at the Capital were looking for support not dependence.

The winding, stumpy road that served as the village street was even more dangerous and full of holes than the forest road. In the open clearing facing the lake spring had made greater headway and the village was an ugly sight except for the marvellous fringes of crystal icicles that decorated the eaves of each cabin. About the doorways of the houses the snow lay melting into black pools, in the midst of each the heap of winter garbage raised its evil-smelling head. The Captain glanced at one of the most untidy establishments set back from the village in its own corner of the forest. He touched his horse and hurried past. He must visit the Challoners soon, but not to-day. Ever since the death of his wife, some three years earlier, he had found it only tactful to avoid these his old friends. He could not help being aware of the fact that he was the only eligible unmarried man in the township, and felt that Miss Lucy and Miss Harriet were wont to give him an over-warm welcome. They had steadily grown poorer every year since their arrival in Upper Canada, and were now stranded with only their incompetent, dreamy brother between them and actual want. Osborne always felt guilty in their presence, re-

membering that it was he who had lured them thither by promises of great wealth. It seemed as if Miss Harriet looked at him a little reproachfully, and Miss Lucy as though she were begging him to rescue them from their plight.

For now he had other dreams of a new mistress for the Hermitage. Dreams that had to be put by till these looming election expenses were somehow met. They were very disturbing dreams at their best. There was Marcia Hadding, his friend's eldest daughter; she was his choice, or at least he was almost sure she was his choice. Marcia was so sweet and gentle, and pretty, too, and so devoted to her sick mother. It would be a suitable match. He knew that Hadding would be pleased. Marcia was young enough to be attractive, just thirty, not too young for him, and yet not much older than his daughter, now comfortably married at the Capital.

Osborne had quite made up his mind about Marcia many a time when that baggage Julia would come romping across his path. Julia was not as good looking as her stately sister. She was not at all well-behaved, and would be most unsuitable for the head of such a house as his—and yet there was something very disturbing about the hoydenish gypsy. She was surely a product of the wild forest as her mother often complained: a flaming fire weed that had sprung up after the first trees were burned. She was as unlike the rest of the Hadding family as though she belonged to Chief Big Wind who carried his canoe across the Portage when the settlers arrived. She was

a most alluring monkey! But nineteen and fifty-nine! He dared not contemplate it! That impertinent rebel at the mill would not stop at giving him a charivari! Captain Osborne shivered with something more chilling than the March wind.

The sudden remembrance of his debts added to the chill. It was brought to his remembrance by the sight of Hawkins, host of the King's Arms, hurrying down the rickety steps of the tavern to meet him. Osborne splashed recklessly through the mud and melting snow in which the log tavern stood like a forlorn island in a sea of ink. He did not want to face the whinings of Hawkins to-day when he was going to see Marcia. He must face Hawkins some day and how he was to do it he did not know. It was the custom of the country at election time that each candidate should keep open house in a tavern at the polling place for the benefit of all those who were good enough to come out and vote for him. Osborne had already spoken for the tavern for next June and he already owed the proprietor money for former election purposes. He heard Hawkins shout to him and saw him wave his arm. It filled Gentleman Osborne with indignation that Hawkins should dare to shout after him. There was no doubt that his maxim, "Keep down the underbrush," was a true one. Give one of these underlings any privileges and he became immediately insufferable.

And where was the money to come from? he asked of the drear winter landscape, of the bare ice-bound lake and the naked wind-swept forest.

And here were the rebels trying to force through a ruinous bill, a bill to tax all lands! "They will reduce us to beggary," he muttered, "and then they will see what will become of their wretched country."

When he had safely passed the tavern he slowed up at the shanty of Big Malcolm Walker, the Portage teamster. Maggie, his wife, was out in the swimming, wind-swept yard, hanging out her spring washing of blankets. Her head was tied up in a triangular piece of red flannel, her grey homespun skirts were turned up revealing a short, gaily-striped petticoat. She was a pleasant sight, just what a pioneer woman should be, Osborne reflected, her strong arms spreading out the grey stretches of homespun, the product of her own hands. A couple of red-cheeked youngsters capered about in the mud and water of the doorway, and a baby pressed his weeping face against the window-pane.

As she fought with the wind and the blankets Maggie was shouting at her neighbor on the other side of the low, brush fence who, in a whirl of smoke, was boiling a great cauldron of spring soap. Maggie was objecting shrilly to the smoke on her clean blankets, while the soap-maker with equal shrillness and deep meaning, was retorting that as far as she could tell there was little harm likely to come to the blankets.

Maggie stopped hastily at the sight of the gentleman. She had been a servant in the Hadding family before her marriage, and though she could prove herself a valiant warrior in a back

fence dispute she never forgot what was due the gentry. She came out from behind the walloping line of grey homespun and dropped a curtsy.

"Is Malcolm at the stables, Maggie?" he asked throwing a couple of pennies to the two water-nymphs at the door.

Maggie pointed down the road. "No, sir, not to-day. The Squire got up a rail-splitting contest in his Black Ash swamp. Malcolm's down there, sir, splittin' rails. And how are ye, Captain, now that ye're back from the city? I'd like to ask ye to drop in for a cup o' tea, but the house is jist that full o' smoke and it gets in your eyes," she gave a vicious glance over the fence towards the soap-maker.

Gentleman Osborne was facing the bitterness of a political campaign and he knew better than to take sides in such an affray. He thanked her. No, he would see Malcolm, for he was going to the Birches. If Malcolm was in a rail-splitting contest there was no doubt of who should win. He was glad the family were all well, and she was looking younger than ever.

He left the village and rode out the rough trail that led east of the Portage to his friend's home. He had not gone far on the forest road when there came to him on the March wind the sound of roaring and cheering. Evidently the whole male population of the Portage was down in Hadding's Black Ash swamp. Mingled with the yelling came the sounds of furious chopping. A well-trampled road led off the highway into the swamp in the direction of the uproar. Osborne turned his horse

into it frowning. That was like Percy! Instead of attending to his land these pressing spring days he was as usual spending his energies on some foolish village sport. He was always getting up something, and was the most popular man in the township. A curling-club to go roaring out on the ice of the lake in winter, a cricket club to play on the lumpy square in front of the tavern in summer, canoe races, cock-fights, anything but his own work. And now he had found a new sport; a rail-splitting contest! Well, well, Osborne reflected indulgently. If Percy had not something to divert him surely he would be swamped by his troubles. His wife, a complaining invalid, his only son a wastrel, who lived at the Capital and kept his father poor paying his debts, his farm going to ruin, and his substance slowly dwindling—how else could life be made endurable unless one plunged into something!

As he drew near his sportsman's eye kindled at the sight of the conflict. There was Hadding mounted upon a stump, waving his cap and yelling like a madman, and there on a higher stump, yes, really, was Julia, dancing and calling upon Malcolm to win, and looking wilder and lovelier than ever—Julia the disturber!

She spied Osborne as he approached and waved to him ecstatically, "Oh, Captain, Captain, Hurry, hurry! Malcolm's winning! Malcolm's ahead! Hurry! Hurry! He's six rails ahead!" she was screaming.

Hadding turned for a moment but he had no time to give to his friend more than a wave of

welcome. He was raising his bets on Malcolm and the forest resounded with his roars. Osborne rode closer and looked over the heads of the yelling crowd of men. In the centre of a wide circle, in a welter of chips stood the two contestants their leaping axes working madly.

Big Malcolm Walker, the Portage teamster, had for years been the champion rail-splitter of the community. But recently a rival had been reported as dwelling in a settlement south of the Lake. There was a great deal of talk concerning his prowess and the Squire gave nobody rest until the man had been invited to come and try conclusions with the champion of Osborne Township to see who could split the most rails in a given number of hours. Hadding's Black Ash swamp with its great straight-stemmed trees was an ideal place for the contest. The trees were exactly fitted for the construction of the eleven-foot fence rails, which were now so much a necessity in the slowly clearing country.

Two hundred, or at best two hundred and fifty rails, was considered a good day's work for an axe-man. This meant felling the tree, cutting it into the required lengths, and with a wedge, splitting the trunk into the regulation-sized rails. Big Malcolm could far outdistance the biggest day's work. He had established a record of four hundred and fifty ash rails in twelve hours, and so far no one had been found who could compete with him. But here there had been found a foeman worthy of his axe and maul and the two were facing each other now.

"Speed against strength," Osborne commented pausing beside the stump where Julia was dancing. Big Malcolm with his seven-pound axe was hewing his way to victory with thundering blows. His rival, a much smaller, nimbler man, was swinging his light, four-pound axe with a swift and sure aim, that equally prophesied victory.

Suddenly Julia cried out in distress and stood poised, her hands clasped. It was plain that Malcolm was in trouble. He who could tell the quality of a black ash tree at one glance had somehow cut down a cross-grained trunk. Hadding gave a shout of dismay as Malcolm's axe floundered and flailed away at the crooked fibre.

His rival, encouraged by the roars of his friends, was slowly creeping up. Malcolm was now only four rails ahead, now only three! He had got his wedge in but it seemed caught in a grip that no mortal power could loosen. Hadding was roaring profanely and his daughter was almost weeping. Malcolm's mighty maul came crashing down again and again upon the immovable wedge. The sweat was pouring down his face and his great bare arms.

The alien was creeping up. Rails were flying from his wedge like matchwood. The referee, on his stump was counting inexorably, "One hundred and thirty, one hundred and thirty-one, one hundred and thirty-two," They were even now. He would soon be ahead! Then with a giant blow, Malcolm split the obstruction. Amid the yells of his friends, he had snatched up his axe and once more chips were falling around him like hail. He

was creeping up again. One hundred and thirty-five for the alien, but Malcolm was thundering at his heels. Now he had caught up, they were even! Then Malcolm crept ahead—one rail—two rails! And Julia Hadding leaped across to her father's stump and hugged him and cried that Malcolm had won.

But her father bade her be quiet. For Malcolm was wrestling with another tough section of that disastrous trunk. The limit of the time was almost reached. Tommy Hawkins was standing on a stump holding his watch, and beside him old Sim Collins, with his fowling-piece held ready to fire at the last second. Malcolm's maul was flailing madly. The enemy's axe was whirling through the trunk as though it had been a giant candle. He was ready again with his wedge. Crack!—another rail—and another, while Malcolm's maul descended in thunder like Thor's hammer. One hundred and thirty-five for the enemy, one hundred and thirty-six, . . . Malcolm's wedge went through the timber with a crack like a thunder bolt. One hundred and thirty-five—and "*bang*" went Old Collins' fowling-piece. The contest was over. The alien had won by one rail!

Big Malcolm stood for a moment dripping and dazed, and then he dropped his maul, and held out his mighty hand to the winner. The Highlander shook it fervently.

"She'll be beating a better man than herself!" he cried in an accent that showed he had not been as successful in wrestling with the English language as he had with timber. "She'll be beating a

better man than herself!" His breath was coming in long heaves. "If she would not be getting her so tough and so crabbed," he gasped generously, "She would be chopping down ta whole Ash plack swamp whateffer!"

The crowd went roaring off towards the tavern, bearing the contestants, and after assuring them that he would not fail to join them for supper at the King's Arms Hadding came over to his friend to welcome him home. Julia leaped from her stump and running to Malcolm threw her arms about his neck and declared she was proud of him, for he had really won. She was able to shake hands with the victor, nevertheless, and congratulate him. She stood alone in the crowd of rough men, laughing and chaffing with them all. Osborne, sitting apart on his horse, in a certain Jove-like aloofness, could not but wish that she were a little more sedate. But she was a very disturbing sight with her hair blown about from under her fur cap—reddish brown hair, that caught the sunlight, her eyes dancing, her cheeks glowing.

Hadding touched the girl's hand as she leaped upon her shaggy, French Canadian pony, then he mounted his own bony horse and slowly they turned towards the Birches. There had been a day when the Hadding stables had held a fine array of horses and now there were only these two and the oxen for the heavy farm work. Hadding could scarcely welcome his friend so chagrined he was over Malcolm's defeat.

"Drat the man," he cried as they picked their way over the treacherous corduroy road that led

to the Birches. "It was sheer stupidity on Malcolm's part to pick out that tree!" He knows ash trees as well as I know my own family. He knew better, plague take his thick head!"

Julia excused herself and galloped ahead. If the Captain was coming to tea there must be something prepared, and well she knew there was nothing in the larder, and only Old Merrin in the kitchen crippled with rheumatism!

"Yes, you need brains, even behind an axe," Hadding continued. "Well, well, it's good to see you in the backwoods again, Wilfred. How goes the new settlement scheme? How did the Governor receive it? Why, man alive, Malcolm knows a good ash tree a mile away. What was the matter with the fool? Well, well, we'll get away home and have some tea. I'm a fool as I suppose you are thinking to bother with such things. Look at that huzzy, Jewel, ride! She should have been the boy instead of Basil. If Jewel had been a boy this place would not have been in the state it is now. Hang that fellow, picking out that twisted piece of timber!"

"Well, tell us about these five-acre farms. I hear that the Smith brothers are getting on famously. They went into the bush up there by the MacAllister settlement a month ago. They ought to have something cleared by this time unless they're as stupid as Malcolm Walker. The numbskull!"

Osborne tried to tell something about this new colonization scheme which ought to bring enough votes to ensure his being elected. They were to

found a peasantry in Upper Canada, and were to introduce the Seignorial Tenure. It was the only sensible way he felt to settle the country, and the Governor agreed with him. Yes, he had been talking with Pierson that morning, and he reported that the Smiths were doing well. Their families were to be moved in before the Spring roads broke up. Most of them were in Toronto already.

Hadding tried to listen, but he had not much interest in the Smiths. He could not forget the arrant wrong-headedness of Malcolm in choosing that one crooked tree out of all those acres of straight, clean black ash.

They rode along the edge of the stumpy fields of the Birches. There was a high paling round the immediate grounds of the residence, but the posts were rotted and most of it was falling. The high, imposing gate posts of walnut leaned to one side drunkenly. The winding avenue of lovely birches made a beautiful approach to the house, but there was only a rough track between them through the deeply rutted snow. The avenue led up to a broad, low, log house, a very imposing residence for that day, with its verandas and dormer windows, but it showed every sign of neglect and decay. The fence surrounding the woodyard at the back had fallen down and firewood and brush and chips were strewn as far as the front door. A bag of chicken feed stood on the front veranda and the hens were scratching about the door-way.

As they drew up at the front veranda a big lad

with hanging head and shuffling gait came floundering round from the back door through the snow of the veranda a couple of big dogs capering about him. This was Taffy the Welshman, as Hadding called him, a simple, faithful lad who had been in the family for years and was now almost all that was left of the old retinue of servants.

Taffy was a privileged character and as he came to take the gentlemen's horses it did not please him to be pleasant. "Hey, there, look at Taffy the Welshman!" chuckled Hadding. "He's been sulking all day because I wouldn't let him go to the rail-splitting!"

"Ho, Taffy," cried Osborne, "Let's see how smart you are!" He flung a couple of coins into the snow and the lad bounded after them with shouts of childish glee. He was all smiles and chuckles when he shuffled away to the stables with the horses.

"Come away in," the host cried heartily, flinging wide the door and stamping the snow from his feet. He kicked the hens away from the doorway as his friend entered. "Come, away! Eh, it's good to see you back, Wilfred. Ever since you went to Toronto I have been saying, with Sir Alexander Selkirk, that I would rather dwell in the midst of alarms than reign in this horrible place without a friend. If it weren't for Challoner I'd have turned *Bois Brulé* while you were away. It was a great fight though, after all, wasn't it? But they weren't evenly matched. That Cameron yokel should never have come near Malcolm's score, not in a hundred ash plack swamps, what-

effers. Come away in. Marcia will be having tea for us."

A wide main hall with a handsome staircase and raftered ceiling ran the whole length of the house. On the right a door opened into the drawing-room, on the left the first door led into the Squire's private room. It was called the office, and was the place where Hadding had once dreamed of transacting all the business of a great estate. It had a substantial desk and many book shelves. There were only a few books on them and the rest of the space was filled with a miscellaneous collection: papers and pamphlets, pairs of riding-boots, and boot-jacks, old hats and caps and pieces of fire-arms. The rest of the room like the shelves was in a litter, from the huge fire-place with its ash-strewn hearth to the fine, steel-engravings hung crooked on the wall, and dim with dust.

Hadding put his head out of the door and shouted for Taffy to bring some wood. The boy came shuffling in and soon there was a roaring fire sending out a cheering warmth into the otherwise cheerless room. They drew up their chairs close to it and smoked and talked. Osborne laid out more fully his new colonization scheme which the Governor had approved so heartily and which had already been launched in the northern acres of his own land. As he talked once more the old glow of the Empire-builder came over him. He grew enthusiastic. They would be great seigneurs, one day, he promised. Squire Hadding had been giving him his attention and had ceased to bemoan the black ash stupidity of Malcolm Walker.

But he saw in the scheme what Osborne generally overlooked, the human element.

"Five acres." He ran his fingers through his bushy hair. "It doesn't seem much. Do you think the poor beggars can make a living on that much?"

"Why not? How many of the farmers in the old land are comfortable and happy on no more.

"Yes, but that's Old England. Here they can't eat the cursed timber!"

"The Government gives them help for the first year. The land is free, remember, and each son gets five acres near home as soon as he is of age. Why it's princely treatment."

They were interrupted by a knock on the door. Taffy had been sent to summon them to tea. Gentleman Osborne knew something of the deplorable financial condition to which his friend had been sunk by his son's debts, but man-like, he had no idea of just what an effort was required on the part of the young ladies to make that summons to tea possible. Julia had ridden ahead to her sister with the glorious news that the Captain was coming. That he would stay to tea was not such good news for Julia, but she knew that any news concerning their friend brought the roses to Marcia's pale cheeks.

She found her sister seated by the fire in the faded drawing room. It was a comfortable-looking room with an ugly but necessary stove to supplement the inadequate heat from the fire-place. A couple of fine French windows let in a great deal of cold but also gave a fine view of the wide

lawn and the snowy lake. The furniture was covered with faded chintz, there were some fine family portraits in gilded frames on the stained walls and silver candlesticks on the mantle. Marcia Hadding was sewing on a wide rent in her sister's woollen skirt. Her sweet gentle face had a look of patient melancholy, and her soft grey eyes seemed to be asking why the world should be such a hard and lonely place.

Julia whirled into the room in her riding dress, like a breath of bracing cold air. She was as striking a contrast in appearance to her elder sister as she was in character. She was tall and strong and radiant. Marcia loved to sit by the fire and sew or read, Julia never sat unless she had to. She did not care to read. She considered the novels of Miss Jane Austen, which her sister admired so much, insupportably silly. Neither did she sew if she could avoid it. She was far more skilful with a hammer and nails and a saw than she was with a needle. When the roof leaked and the plaster descended she climbed aloft and mended the breach. She would have mended all the broken down fence if her sister's distressed pleading had not made her stop. Indeed, no one but Taffy knew all her activities. He had been her constant attendant since childhood, and only he knew all she could do with a gun or an axe. And Taffy never told.

But she was a child no longer, she was nineteen and for the first time she was turning her abounding energies to the heavy problems of housekeeping. She had been sent to Toronto the winter

before to a select school for young ladies, but Basil's debts had made a second term impossible. It was on her return home that she had realized for the first time that old Merrin, their last remaining servant, was in no way capable of looking after their home.

"If we go on like this we'll get like Harriet and Lucy Challoner," she declared when her sister protested at her sweeping the room. "We'll die in the midst of dirt and confusion. I'm going out to Bidsey's to get her to teach me how to make bread, and when I get Merrin and Taffy out of the way I'm going to scrub the kitchen floor!"

"But Jewel, dear," cried her sister in distress, "Think of your hands."

"They can't be any worse," she cried, "And think of our stomachs! We've got to eat. Even Norval Challoner says he believes everyone in this country ought to work. He's trying to chop wood since Rigby left, poor dear!"

Marcia Hadding fitted a large patch on the sleeve of the Squire's coat and sighed heavily. "This country is so hard on people of our position, Jewel."

Julia laughed. "Miles Hardy says the only position for a man in this country is at the end of an axe-handle," she said.

"I think, sister," Marcia said gently, "That it isn't wise to go to the mill so much. It did not matter when you were little. But Mr. Pierson was telling Papa that the men who meet there are all rebels. They read that dreadful paper, the

Colonial Advocate, and they are not loyal to the King."

"Well, Miles Hardy isn't a rebel," Julia declared, "He's just trying to make things a little easier for the new settlers. Why, I'm sure he and Ellen know much more than we do, Marcia. They were reading a new book the other day. I think it was called *Sartor Resartus*, and I had to ask them what it was about. Do you know, Marsh?"

"Not exactly dear, but I think that is the name of a book written by Mr. Thomas Carlyle. But I am sure that people like the Hardys could not appreciate it. I think it is time for me to give Mamma her drops."

It was thus all arguments ended until Julia gave up all arguing and went her own way. And now, having announced the news that the Captain was on his way to the Birches so soon after his return from the Capital, she gave her mind to preparing an adequate meal for him. Marcia was visibly pleased, and in spite of her stately calm, somewhat excited. She arose to go upstairs.

"Please Julia, tell Merrin that the Captain will be here to tea," she said as she disappeared.

The younger girl went on towards the kitchen, a perplexed frown between her eyes. "Tell Merrin!" she said to herself as she hurried along the cold hall to the kitchen. It seemed impossible for her sister to grasp the fact that Merrin was almost useless. She alone was left of the women servants, and she was old, half-blind, and crippled with rheumatism. The kitchen was a great bare room with large tables and at one end a huge fire-

place. And in the middle of the room was a great treasure for pioneer days, a cook-stove. It was red with rust, but there was a comfortable fire in it and the old woman sat close to it, her head tied up in a piece of grey flannel.

She looked up in protest as her young mistress entered. Old Merrin shared Miss Marcia's fond belief that she still looked after the affairs of the household, though she more often forgot to prepare a meal than she remembered. Taffy was seated on the other side of the stove whimpering over a cut finger. He ran to Julia holding up the wounded member like a hurt child. She bound it up skilfully, pitying and bewailing him until he was sure he was a great hero, and at her suggestion went off happily to bring in the wood for the drawing-room fire.

Then she wound one of Merrin's big white aprons about her and set to making scones for tea. Making scones was a far more difficult undertaking than mending the roof even, and old Merrin watched her young mistress in misery, protesting against the sacrilege. And Taffy came in from his work every few minutes to see how she was progressing and to offer his clumsy help.

The scones were made at last. They were heavier than those Merrin turned out and some were burned and some underdone, but Julia, flushed and triumphant, spread them on a platter, and buttered them carefully.

She grew very serious over the matter of the butter. Big Malcolm's wife, Maggie, who had been a maid in the Hadding home before her marriage

had made it a habit, since Merrin's strength had failed, to come up once a week and churn and make the butter. The Haddings had accepted the kindness gratefully, all but Julia. She knew, from her frequent visits to Maggie's shanty, just how much the young woman had to do, with a big family of children and her big husband to cook and sew and wash and spin for. She felt there was something altogether wrong in Maggie coming away up to the Birches to work for them when they had nothing to pay her with. Julia determined that she would go out to Mat's place some day soon and make Bidsey show her how to make butter and then she would surprise Maggie.

When the tray was ready, Julia had Taffy change his coat and carry it to the drawing-room and summon the gentlemen. Then she took off her apron, smoothed her wild hair and followed. Marcia had descended from the sick room dressed in her best gown, a very old and much mended one, but a soft becoming blue. She had put away her mending, and instead was working on a dainty piece of embroidery. It had been plain for a long time to Julia's honest eyes that her sister was waiting humbly and hopefully for Captain Osborne to ask her to marry him. That she had ever disturbed his elderly heart herself had never crossed her wildest imaginings. She was very tender and pitying over Marcia, and devoutly hoped that the Captain would realize how altogether lovely she was. So she strove to make the little tea party a success.

Marcia seated herself by the tea table and

poured the tea from the old silver tea-pot, her hands white and graceful, her sweet face shining. She looked very attractive to the guest. Julia in her thick boots, with her large hands awkwardly seeking some outlet for their abounding energy, paled in contrast. The guest felt his erring heart turning obediently into its proper channel.

Julia and the Squire could talk of nothing but the disastrous outcome of the contest. Malcolm should never have been beaten, father and daughter echoed in sympathetic duet.

"Why, Miles Hardy says there's nothing in Upper Canada to match him!" Julia declared finally.

Marcia looked faintly distressed. She knew their guest disliked the very name of the Miller of Gala Water.

"Jewel, dear, don't you remember Captain Osborne promised to tell us all about the Great Assembly at the Capital?"

The guest looked pleased and tried to describe to them some of the most brilliant social doings in Toronto. But how could young ladies expect an old soldier to describe ladies dresses? he asked gaily. Somebody had said that Lady Bond Head had looked magnificent in ruby velvet and diamonds—or was it white lace and pearls?

The young ladies laughed gleefully, and encouraged, the Captain went on.

It's simply incomprehensible to me how that starved little Highland pony could beat a draught horse like Malcolm," the host broke in determinedly on the Government Ball. "Twisted trunk

or no twisted trunk. That doesn't account for it!"

"When this new settlement scheme of ours goes through there will be two young ladies from Waubaushene Portage who will outshine even the Governor's lady," Osborne said gallantly taking a third scone. Julia felt grateful to him. She would have liked to boast that she had made them but she knew Marcia would be distressed. She dreaded the Captain's knowing that they had to stoop to such menial tasks.

"Oh, do tell us about this wonderful new colonization plan," Marcia said with shining eyes.

Under the pleasant influence of the tea table, the guest stayed till the host was visibly impatient to get away to the promised celebration at the King's Arms.

When the two men were gone Julia sat silent for a time looking into the fire. "But really, Marsh," she broke out at last, "I don't think it's right."

"What isn't right dear,?" asked her sister disturbed in her rosy dream.

"Those five-acre farms. Miles Hardy says fifty acres isn't enough for a man to bring up a family on, and Malcolm says five acres is a crime."

Marcia grew stately. "I do think, dear, that Malcolm is very ungrateful to speak so of any of Captain Osborne's plans. It does seem the more one does for the settlers the more they complain."

This was an echo of Captain Osborne. Julia's eyes softened with the pity that always warmed them when her sister showed how anxious she was to please the great man.

"Well, I'm glad they didn't treat the MacAllisters that way," she said, "I just couldn't have my Allister MacAllister settled on five acres."

The sisters laughed and the tension was relieved. This was Jewel's joke, the nonsensical girl. She always pretended to be in love with the kilted laddie who had given her his pink glass marble and taken her to see the Indian babies the day she had arrived.

Jumping up, she ran singing to the kitchen to prepare her mother's early supper. She had learned from Bidsey how to make gruel and with thin slices of toast and a pot of tea brewed just as poor Mamma liked it she arranged a tempting tray and carried it to the sick room.

Marcia was sitting reading to the invalid who lay in a big canopied bed. There was a heavy carpet on the floor and heavy curtains on the windows, and the soft cande-light gave an appearance of comfort and cosiness. But Julia knew there was something wrong with the room, and that if Maggie or Bidsey were here things would be different. The vigorous young girl would gladly have rolled up her sleeves and swept and dusted and cleaned, but well she knew that the sight of her daughter at such a task would do the invalid more harm than the dust and disorder.

"You're feeling better to-night, aren't you, Mamma, dear?" Julia asked as she always did.

Mrs. Hadding turned her languid eyes upon her younger daughter, her long delicate hand touched lovingly the rough brown ones. "I'm just about

the same, Jewel, darling. I should be better if Basil were home."

I scarce can either go or creep
Since Lubin is away.

sang Julia. "That's how you feel isn't it, Mamma, mine?"

The mother turned her head away wearily. "You are so vigorous, dear child," she complained, "Your very presence is fatiguing."

The elder sister took the tray and the younger one slipped from the room. Her feelings were not at all hurt. Her mother had always been disturbed by her presence since she was a noisy little thing and had to be kept away under Bidsey's care. She went back to the kitchen. Taffy had eaten his supper off the kitchen table and mounted her pony and gone to the Portage to accompany his master home. It was nightly becoming more of a necessity for Taffy to convoy the Squire to his home. Old Merrin was dozing by the fire. Julia roused her and made her go to her bed. Then she went about the many duties that were possible for her to do only when Merrin was out of the way. Taffy had milked the cow and left the foaming pail on the floor just inside the door-way. Julia strained the milk and put it away in the pans in the vast cold store-room at the back of the kitchen. She went carefully over the larder, the scantiness of the butter still troubled her. But there was oatmeal for breakfast and a few eggs, and tomorrow she would run through the swamp to Bidsey and demand to know just how butter was made.

When everything was done, Julia wandered upstairs to her chilly little room under the eaves. After the excitement of the afternoon, life seemed very dull. If Taffy had not taken her pony, Bateese, she would ride down to the Portage and see how Maggie was taking Malcolm's defeat. Julia had some well-founded fears that Malcolm would get a warm scolding for allowing the alien to beat him. She looked out through the small-paned window. It was not quite dark yet and she decided to take the dogs and walk or rather run down to Maggie's yet. Marcia was at her mother's side as usual and it was impossible to sit still with nothing to do. Maggie would be glad of her company for Malcolm would be still at the tavern, and then she might run over to the Challoners and see how poor Norval was getting on with his wood chopping.

She was running down the back stairs when her sister came hurriedly from the sick room.

"Jewel," she called in a frightened whisper, "I'm worried about Mamma. She feels so faint and her pulse is so fast. She wants Bidsey. Will you tell Taffy to take Bateese and go for her?"

"Taffy's gone to the Portage for Papa," said Julia in dismay, "I'll go for Bidsey myself."

"Oh, no, Jewel, not through the swamp at this time. Why it's almost dark and the wolves. . . ."

"I'll take Fido and Jupiter. I'm not afraid. Mat will bring us back on the sleigh."

She was downstairs by this time pulling on her moccasins, her sister protesting feebly.

"I can't bear to think of your going through the

Black Ash swamp alone, Jewel. It'll be quite dark before you get there. Ride up to the Portage and get Maggie to come. Or ask Malcolm to go out for Bidsey."

Julia nodded as she flung on coat and mittens and her sister hurried back to the sick room. It was like Marcia, the younger girl told herself, to think that everybody and everything must be at hand when they were in need. She did not think it was necessary to enlighten Marcia as to the fact that there was not a horse on the place for her to ride, she had long since learned to take matters in her own capable hands. She darted upstairs to take one anxious peep at the white, exhausted face on the pillow, and then with a reassuring wave of her hand to her sister she was off.

The two big dogs, lying in the straw of the shed, leaped joyfully towards her but she ordered them down. She decided that she would yield to Marcia's fears and go for Maggie instead. The road was not so long nor so lonely as the forest trail to Bidsey's and she decided not to take the dogs. There was always a bloody fight with Malcolm's whenever they went to the Portage.

As she ran down the avenue she skimmed lightly over the hard crust that the night's frost had laid over the soft snow. She found to her surprise that the day had not yet gone. The glow of the western heavens still burned behind the deep blue of the forest. Why it seemed just like mid-day. By the time she reached the big sagging

gate posts she decided to go to Bidsey's. Bidsey had been her nurse, and a faithful servant of the Haddings from the time of their arrival in the new country. She had married one of the farm hands, and when the Hadding fortunes declined they had gone into the bush and taken up some of the Hadding land. Their clearing was back from the settlement, about two miles. There was a winter road broken through from the Portage road, and many a time Julia had ridden down it. She knew the forest as she knew the grounds about her father's house. When she came to the place where Mat's road led into the woods she turned and ran into the swamp without a thought of fear.

She did not run fast for she had nearly two miles to go and she knew better. Instead she trotted along at the easy Voyageur pace that Big Malcolm had taught her. The light of evening faded behind her, the great pillars of the black ash trees towered above her, their smooth boles unmarred by branches for forty feet. The long grey aisles grew black and hushed. Julia paused and lit the torch of pine which she always carried at night. And on she ran holding the flaming light on high, exulting in her strength and in the knowledge that she was doing something for the dear, helpless one lying suffering at home.

Fire Weed, her father called her; she smiled at the remembrance and waved the little torch. A real flaming fire weed she was to-night, he would say, if he could guess at her daring escapade, sending a swift shaft of light away down the aisles of the ice-bound forest. And so she ran,

thinking only of her loved ones, and not once dreaming that down those dark aisles ahead, one who was young and daring and flaming like herself was coming on swift feet to meet her.

CHAPTER X.

THE WOLF DANCE

MANY a time Allister had pictured himself in his fiddler's dreams leaving home for the wide world. But always his heart was light and he went forth as a conqueror. But now as he left the bounds of the MacAllister settlement in the grey morning light his feet were slow and heavy and his heart was sick with longing to turn back to where Little Johnny had turned homeward after seeing him a mile on his way. The parting with Little Johnny was something he dared not think of yet. He shouldered his axe determinedly, tied his fiddle closer on his back, and trudged on.

The rough trail across the Barrier was a long and lone trudge. He reached the settlement at the English Block at nightfall and was received at the first shanty where he pulled the string as though the inmates had been awaiting him. He turned southward the next morning, saying he was on his way to the Portage to work for Miles Hardy. The road south from the English Block was punctuated with scattered clearings and his way was made easy. All wayfarers received a royal welcome, and one with a fiddle was a royal visitor. A traveller brought news of other clearings and the settlers were hungry for news. No

matter at what time of day or night he might pull the string of the latch there was always a plate of porridge or pork and potatoes set before him. And if he could be prevailed upon to spend the night it was all the better.

Hospitality was the same when he came to the Irish settlement. The Murphys were just like the other settlers he found, Papists though they might be. He was going to work for Miles Hardy, was he? Well, he was the lad for luck for there wasn't another such a man as Miles Hardy in Osborne township. In every shanty they chanted the praises of the Miller of Gala Water, and the nearer the traveller approached the louder the praises became.

Wasn't it Miles Hardy that saw them through the dry year when everything was burned up; and the wet year when the praties all rotted in the ground? And there was the summer of the great hail, when there wasn't a bag of wheat to go to the mill nor even a handful for seed. Eh, it was Miles Hardy that sent them a barrel of flour and told them to pay just when they could.

When Allister came to the last clearing of the Irish Line he found himself on the borders of the great Hadding estate. At the last shanty of the hospitable Murphys he enquired as to the whereabouts of Mat McKim and his wife Bidsey. He recalled their relationship to Mrs. Sandy Red and the Frasers and felt they would be a link with home if he could get to them.

Sure, wasn't it the best way to the Portage to go by Mat McKim's, his host declared. It would save

him many a mile to cross over instead of going all the way round by the road. There was a blazed trail straight through to Mat's, and the craters would be glad to see him; there would be no getting away again. Yes, Mat and his wife had both been servants on the Hadding place in the good old days when the Squire had so many to fetch and carry for him. It was a mighty different time now-a-days. The Squire had given Mat a lot back of his Black Ash swamp and there was a good road out from his clearing to the Portage.

He started at grey dawn, for there were many tales abroad about the wolves being bad. His hostess filled his sack with pork and boiled potatoes for his dinner, and his host tramped with him a mile into the forest to give him the direction and start him on the blazed trail.

"See that ye keep up a good trot," he warned as he pointed out the mark on the line of trees, and bade him farewell. "It'll take ye the whole day to get to Mat's clearing, and if ye're overtaken by night in that swamp ye'll be like to spend it in a tree."

He stood for a long time watching the young adventurer move down the forest trail, and shouting last instructions. He was to keep to the blaze and he couldn't miss Mat's clearing. Mat was the foine boy and so was Bidsey, and he was to come back soon and stay longer.

It was a long day's tramp through the dense forest. Allister's heart grew hot as he tramped on hour after hour. So much rich land so near to the Front and all untouched! The MacAllisters

should have had this, Red Sandy had always said. It was all the best of timber and was well-watered. Allister pictured the gentry as Aunt Teenie and the other women so often described them, spending their days in idleness and then going out for a walk just to give themselves something to do. He would soon see their fine places with their lawns and gardens, their idle men and their useless women.

He had but one glimpse of humanity on all the lone day's travel. As he sat on a log eating his potatoes and pork there came past him a silent file of Indians going south with their furs for the Spring trade. The braves strode ahead in single file, their guns on their shoulders, the squaws trailed behind pulling the hand-sleighs piled with furs and their camp equipment. Allister followed them, glad of the company, and found they were following his blaze straight to the Portage.

They turned to the west just at evening and Allister went on alone. He had not gone many paces till he saw ahead the light of a clearing. Then he came upon the tracks of a man's shoe-packs and following them he came to the open clearing shining in the rosy glow of evening and set in its deep blue ring of forest.

Two great dogs leaped up from the shanty door and rushed towards him with deep bayings and the shanty door was flung open. The shanty was half buried in snow, and its owner, a little hairy man, looked up at Allister like a shaggy ground-hog looking up out of his hole. Then a long hairy arm was shoved out and the visitor was pulled into the

warm shanty followed by the joyously barking dogs.

Allister had been made welcome so many times on his journey that he was accustomed to it by this time, but when he made known his relationship to the Fraser brothers and Mrs. Sandy Red, he was overwhelmed by the rapture of his reception. A cousin of Willie Fraser the weaver! And of Martha Beattie's! And come all the way from the MacAllister settlement! Mat stood and stared at him, and Bidsey walked round him holding up amazed hands, the better to view the wonder.

They had just finished their supper but he was set down to a great meal of pork and potatoes and he ate ravenously. Bidsey waited upon him, but Mat sat close and stared at him in delight, exclaiming over and over to his wife at the wonder. Here was a visitor come from the north! By the blazed trail and from the MacAllister settlement! How many years was it since anyone had come through that way? Everyone who ever came their way, and few there were at best, always came up from the Portage road to the south. Mat could not get over exclaiming at the marvel of the visit.

Bidsey plied him with questions. Mat's cousin Martha, was her man doing well? Did she have a cow? Three cows! Think of that now! And old Willie Fraser, the poor thing. Hadn't Watty got a woman yet? Dear, dear! The poor craters how did they get along at all, at all? Bidsey had been scouring the table when Allister entered and she returned to it while he ate his supper off the

other end. She talked hard and fast and scoured in time. It was already a clean table, the cleanest Allister had seen since he left home. For Bidsey had been well-trained in her years of service in the Hadding household.

Mat had so far recovered from his joyous amazement as to be able to take part in the conversation and questioning regarding his relatives. Allister was put to it to satisfy his ravenous appetite and at the same time attend to the catechizing of both his host and hostess. At last Mat moved about bringing wood and water, and whenever he was out of earshot Bidsey informed the guest with significant nods and winks that her coming out to the bush here as Mat's wife was not the least of the disasters that had come upon the Hadding household. They all had to leave because there were too many mouths to feed. But it was a good home at the Squire's and it was a sad day for her. But what else could a body do? The Squire had given Mat this lot and he had no one to look after him and what else could she do?

Allister had no adequate answer to this problem, his mouth being crammed with scones and Maple syrup. The Squire had been awful kind, Bidsey continued. He had sent out two men to help them build the shanty. But indeed it was a lonely life, and if she didn't get out to the Birches some times she thought she would be like to die. It wasn't often they had a visitor, only dear Miss Julia, the darling, ran out on her snow shoes sometimes with the foolish lad, Taffy.

Allister, well-fed and warmed, felt his head

drooping from weariness as Bidsey's tongue ran on.

It was twelve years since the Squire brought his family out from the Old Country and built the beautiful home for them by the lake, and sure the poor gentleman had had nothing but bad luck ever since. Poor Miss Marcia was well-nigh worried to death with her mother's sickness indeed. If it wasn't for Miss Julia she didn't know what would become of them all. Miss Julia was the smart little lady indeed. . . .

Allister had been trying desperately to keep awake and give attention to Bidsey's story and also Mat's, the latter a tale of an encounter with wolves which was running simultaneously with his wife's. He had been more interested in the man's story, but at the mention of Julia Hadding's almost forgotten name he left Mat treed by wolves and gave full attention to Bidsey. Mat had great staying powers but his wife went much faster and Allister learned that by watching carefully he could listen to both. He was interested in this aspect of the Hadding family. It would seem that the tales about the gentry living in idleness and luxury had not been quite accurate.

Poor little Miss Julia, Bidsey was saying, it was her was the blessed lamb! Never brought up to do a hand's turn, and yet she could do anything. Wasn't the Squire like to die of laughing the day she come out into the wood yard and showed him how she could split wood? And indeed if Miss Marcia hadn't cried when she saw her, she would have split up the whole brush pile. Indeed she

didn't know what would become of them all if it wasn't for Miss Julia. The way she had taken hold since she was away at school. For what with the Squire taking a drop too much, and Master Basil never coming home any more, and the poor lady herself lying on her back, she did not know what would become of them all. Indeed whenever the dear lady took one of her bad spells it was always Bidsey she called for. Nobody but Bidsey would do. Dear, dear, she didn't see how she could have left the dear lady to come away out here to the bush with Mat McKim.

Bidsey stopped long enough to beg him to take out his fiddle. As Allister drew his bow across the strings some dismaying sense of the miles of trackless forest that lay between him and his home, and the heart-breaking quarrel with his uncle got into his fingers. He played only sad and wistful airs: *I'll meet ye on the Lea Rig, Wae's me for Prince Charlie, Ye Banks and Braes*. He could see Aunt Jane Ann when she returned and found him gone, and Little Johnny's face twisted with silent pain as they parted. He dropped into a wailing Irish lament that his mother used to lilt. Bidsey's apron went to her eyes.

"Sure, it's the fairies is under yer fingers, lad," she faltered. "It's playin' the birds off the bushes you'd be. Och hone, for my poor Mother, and a sight o' the old cabin at home. It was the beautiful pigs me father used to raise—so many miles away—so many miles away!"

They refused to let him get away in the morn-

ing. What was his hurry? It was only two miles across the bit of bush to the Birches and not more than a good mile along a fine road to the village. He could wait a bit and still be in time for his dinner at the tavern.

So Allister took his axe and went out with Mat and proved himself as skilful with it as he was with the fiddle-bow. Then Bidsey would not hear of his going till he had had a bite to eat, and she would get an early dinner. But there was so much to tell about the troubles of the Haddings, and the cleverness of Miss Julia, that the afternoon was well on its way before the meal was set upon the table. Then he must just give them one more tune before he went and by that time the short winter afternoon was waning. He was insisting upon departing when Bidsey set up a wail. He was missing the potato scones she was going to bake for supper, and he was forced to wait till they were cooked. Then there were elaborate instructions regarding his road out to the village, and Mat began begging him to stay another night. There were wolves prowling round these nights. But Allister was impatient to be away, and though the light of sunset was flooding the clearing between the intense blue shadows of the forest, he shouldered his axe and his fiddle and started.

Mat accompanied him to the edge of the clearing giving careful directions, mostly regarding the path he was not to take. There was a bit o' clearing he had made in his sugar bush where he had put up a wee sugar shanty, and after he

passed that there were two paths one to the right the other to the left. . . .

Allister tore himself away with no clear idea of which one he was to take. Long after he was out of sight he could hear Mat shouting instruction and Bidsey's voice calling him to come again and stay longer.

He went running down the trail over the crust his heart high, for he would sleep this night at the Portage, the Mecca of his great hopes. He would see Miles Hardy, perhaps to-night. Yes, and he would go to Toronto and see the great Mackenzie, and the place where the fiery sheets of the *Colonial Advocate* had their birth. His ambition had found its wings again.

The last glow of the sunset was gone, but the fires of spring were kindling beyond the forest rim and the glimpse of sky through the thick canopy of branches was a delicate primrose and jade green, with a shining silver moon riding far above the black tree tops. The trail ran into a little clearing as Mat had promised, a circular opening in the forest with the little sugar shanty in the centre. It was a silent, hushed place deeply blue. The underbrush that grew up on all sides and the stumps were covered with snow that glistened in the moonlight. Here and there on the open spaces were a fairy pattern of footprints, this was a rabbit's, that a fox's. They were fixed now in the frozen crust on the snow, like a delicate bas-relief in marble. It seemed a hushed, holy place, Allister stopped whistling and moved silently across the sacred enclosure.

And then he paused to consider. There were the two openings into the forest, the beginning of the two trails and which one had Mat and Bidsey told him to take? He was almost convinced Mat had said the one to the right, but the one to the left was much wider and apparently travelled, so it surely must be the right one. He did not hesitate long. He was near his destination and impatient to get on. He had very little farther to go and he couldn't go very far wrong. And so he turned into the wrong path, a negligible choice apparently, but one that influenced the whole course of two lives.

He plunged into the path and ran on whistling and he had not gone far before he stopped and listened. His quick woodsman ear had detected a sound. Ahead the forest road was dim and uncertain but far down it he descried a twinkling, dancing spark, as though a fire-fly were out in March. He paused and unslung his axe from his shoulder. Then he dimly made out a figure running forward, light-footed over the snow, and just as he realized that it was human and reslung his axe, a woman's voice called, a clear silvery voice that awoke the echoes of the dark forest.

"Ho, Mat! Mat, dear, is that you?"

"No, it's not Mat," Allister shouted, "But I've just come from his place."

The figure stopped a few yards away, then came on slowly. It was a girl, Allister could see at last, not any older than Annie, but taller. In the flickering light of her torch he could see that she was different from the girls he knew. Her coat

was edged with fur and she wore a seal-skin cap, and as she stood before him there came from her a subtle perfume as though it were suddenly spring and the violets and hepaticas were in bloom. Allister remembered his mother's teachings and pulled off his cap.

"It's Bidsey I want," she said, still panting from her run. "My mother is very ill and she wants Bidsey, and I . . . I thought you were Mat." she burst out in disappointment.

"I've just come from his place." Allister said, moved by the tremble in her voice. "If you like to turn back I'll go back for them."

"Oh," she said, and he could see her smile flash out, "Would you be so kind? I'll run back before she misses me. But perhaps you are in a hurry yourself," she added softly.

"No, no." Allister was suddenly in no hurry at all. He would be glad to go back. It was only a step. And what was he to say? He asked shyly.

"Just tell her that Mother has one of her bad spells, Mrs. Hadding. Bidsey will understand. And ask Mat to please bring her at once for I'm afraid." . . . She paused falteringly.

"I'll bring them both. Right away." Allister assured her hastily. "You . . . you don't mind going back alone?" he asked, and was relieved to hear her laugh.

"Oh, no. Why should I? If I know Bidsey is coming I won't mind anything." She turned away. "I think you are very kind indeed," she said.

Allister turned and ran back feeling strangely

warmed and exhilarated. This must be Julia Hadding! And she was running alone through the bush at night without a thought of fear. Annie and Effie would hardly go to the byre alone at night.

He had gone but a few yards when he heard a call behind him. He whirled about to find the girl running down the forest path towards him again.

"What is that?" she cried, "That whining noise?" They stood still listening, their sharply drawn breath the only sound in all the vast stillness of the winter woods. But suddenly there came another sound. From the east where the swamp was densest there arose an eery whine.

"Wolves," Allister said.

"Wolves?" she whispered. "It can't be possible so near the settlement."

Allister was undisturbed. "It will just be one howling at the moon. They wouldn't come so near a clearing."

"But they have been very bold this winter," she faltered, "They told me—listen!" she raised her mittened hand.

The sound came again, nearer and more distinct. There was no mistaking it this time. It was the long quavering call of the timber wolf leader. And immediately there came an answer, in a far-off, dim chorus; far off, but quite near enough. Even Allister was stirred to action.

"Maybe they are somewhere near," he admitted. "You'd better come back with me to McKim's. We'll get the dogs."

She turned and they retraced their steps up the path to the clearing. There was no room to run side by side. Allister stepped behind the girl.

And as they ran there suddenly broke out a chorus of howls startlingly clear. "Run!" Allister cried. "They may be after us."

The girl did not run, she flew. Allister was filled with wonder and admiration as he found himself striving to keep up with her. Her moccasined feet sped over the crust, barely touching the tops of the hillocks. A great log lay across the path. She put one hand on the top of it and went over it like a bird.

Suddenly there came again, directly behind them this time, and terribly clear, the cry of the whole pack. They were on their trail! The sound gave the girl swifter speed. She was like some wild forest creature, a bird that went over every obstruction without seeing it. But as she reached the edge of the little clearing she tripped over a hidden root and went sprawling in the snow. Allister leaping at her heels went over too. They were both up and off again without a word. But they had lost some precious seconds. The howls were nearer and horribly distinct as they burst into the little clearing.

"The sugar shanty!" Allister shouted. The girl swerved and sped towards it dodging the stumps and bushes with marvellous skill. As they dashed across the profaned sanctuary of the little clearing Allister felt his hair rise. For the whole howling pack seemed right on their heels. At the same time he felt the girl's speed slackening. Her

breath was coming in painful gasps. He caught her arm and leaping forward dragged her almost off her feet. As they reached the shelter of the shanty, Allister's eye caught a dark form breaking from the cover of the woods to run parallel with it. The wolves had begun their circling of their prey before they made their final dash.

The two leaped round to the front of the shanty. It had no door!

"The roof!" Allister gasped dragging the girl round to the back where it was low enough for them to climb up. He caught the girl around her knees and flung her up as if she had been a sack of wheat. He had one fleeting thought that it might not hold.

"Dig in your heels!" he yelled. She slipped on the shining snowy surface, caught, smashed through the surface and held. Allister, his eye on the circling forms in the dark rim of the clearing backed away for a run that would land him on the roof. As he did so the long dark form of the leader broke from the darkness, and followed by the pack charged upon him. The girl gave a scream and Allister with a mighty spring landed on the roof beside her. The crust broke with the impact, but his clutching hands slipped. One foot went off. For an instant he hung and then he felt himself caught by the collar and dragged up. Even in his desperation he had a feeling of wonder at the strength of the hands that held him.

The leader of the pack fell back his jaws gleam in the moonlight, and the two scrambled madly to the highest point of the roof. It creaked ominously

but by great, good fortune there grew a huge maple tree right against the front of the little shanty. They climbed up into the branches clinging together. They were silent for a moment their breath coming in gasps.

The wolves, balked of their prey, had retired to the shadows of the trees. They could be seen moving uneasily, dark, sinister shapes against the darkness.

"Oh, for a gun!" Allister groaned.

"Are you sure you are safe there?" the girl asked as he put his feet again upon the roof. "It's so slippery."

Allister looked up at her. He was amazed at her composure. He smiled reassuringly. "Safe as at home," he declared. "I don't think they'll try again."

"I suppose they won't go away till daylight," she whispered, "And my poor mother! And my sister!" She stopped in dismay realizing the anxiety at home when she did not return.

Allister was filled with wonder. She gave no thought to her own plight, only to her mother. The wolves had begun to run in a circle again and Allister pulled off a heavy lump of icy snow and hurled it at them, giving a wild yell. It seemed to halt their proceedings for they retired to the shadows again snarling and yapping.

Allister unslung his axe from his shoulder. "If I could only get one crack at that ugly brute's head!" he cried half rising.

The girl caught hold of him in terror. "You—you don't intend to go down!" she cried in dismay.

He laughed. "No siree! You might not be able to haul me up the second time." he cried.

She laughed too, a tremulous little laugh, but it thrilled the boy. It was marvellous for a girl to laugh under such circumstances. Suddenly he felt gay and full of mad fun. It had always been so with him. He often amazed his brothers by bursting into the wildest spirits just when everything was most depressing. He felt he must do something wild and nonsensical. The girl was beginning to shiver with the cold. The wolves were shifting about in the darkness with no intention of going away.

"I do believe the beggars are having a dance," he cried hurling another piece of ice at the shifting forms. "And us not invited!"

"But we were!" cried the girl, and they both burst into a laugh.

"Well we're just not going," he shouted gaily. "Look at them, will you? All-g-r-a-n-d c-h-a-i-n!" he called off the orders of the dance in Watty Fraser's long-drawn style. "Swing yer partners! Do-see-do!"

"Pass right through

And balance to

And bite the wolf behind you!"

The girl burst into a shout of gay laughter and Allister became wildly hilarious.

"Hang me, if I don't give them a tune," he cried beginning to undo the bundle on his back. "They don't seem very strong on music."

"What with? You surely haven't a fiddle there?" cried the girl.

She watched him in wonder. He wore the rough homespun of the settlers but she had noticed that his speech was not theirs. He spoke more like her own class, and yet with something of a Highland accent. And he had taken off his cap to her when they met.

Allister had his fiddle out by this time and was twanging the strings.

"Now every wolf take his partner for an eight-paw reel! he shouted. He balanced himself on the slippery roof, leaning against the tree, the girl still clutching his coat sleeve. He brought down his bow with a resounding chord and with a shout of "Grand Chain!" he dashed into the gay notes of *The Soldier's Joy*.

And then a marvellous thing happened. With a sudden chorus of yelps the wolves turned tail and fled into the darkness of the forest. The two prisoners on the roof turned and stared at each other. The retreating sounds grew fainter and fainter.

"Why they're running away! They're gone," whispered the girl.

"Losh," shouted the musician, "Was there ever such an insult! The ugly brutes don't know good fiddling when they hear it."

The girl's laugh was a hearty peal this time. "Why, you're a new kind of—what was the name of the man that charmed the beasts with his playing?"

"Orpheus!" cried Allister, grateful that his mother had included that story in his childhood tales. "I'm a new kind of Orpheus! I wonder—"

He stopped suddenly and slapped his knee. He gave a delighted shout. "I remember! I know! Old Angus Campbell, the man that gave me this fiddle told me, and I forgot. He said that wolves can't stand the sound of a fiddle. He drove them away ever so often by playing. I thought he was just bragging." He jumped up. "Come along to McKim's, we're as safe as if we were in the barn yard."

They scrambled down to the edge of the roof but as Allister slipped to the ground and reached up to help her she hesitated.

"Are you quite sure they're all quite gone?" she asked a little tremulously. And for some strange reason this pleased Allister more than her courage.

"Oh, certain," he cried. He took his axe and reconnoitered the dark thicket along the edge of the clearing. He came back whistling. "All safe," he shouted gaily, "I'll march behind you and play my own tune. It would frighten away a Bengal tiger. But the wolves are off. They'll never stop running. They're beyond the Barrier by this time."

"What's the Barrier?" she asked as he reached up to help her down.

"The Barrier? That's the land—" Allister suddenly stopped. This girl was Julia Hadding whose father owned most of this part of the Barrier.

"It's a—just a big swamp," he answered lamely. And then the girl slid down into his arms and he forgot everything else in the wonder and the rapture of it. He was suddenly overcome with shy-

ness. They were both silent as they turned towards the path that led to the McKim clearing. Without another word she ran on, Allister at her heels. There might be no danger but they did not slacken their speed for a moment until they saw ahead the moonlit space of Mat's clearing and heard the baying of his dogs.

The sound brought a sense of safety. They slowed up, breathing heavily. As they came to the low, brush fence that bounded the fields, the girl turned.

"You didn't play the tune," she said, "Your own tune, what is it?"

"Oh, it's just nothing," Allister said shyly, "They called it my tune at home because it begins with my name:

O, Allister MacAllister, your chanter sets us a' a-steer—

The girl took a little leap off the fence and clapped her mittened hands together.

"Allister MacAllister!" she cried. "That surely isn't your name?"

Allister nodded. He could scarcely look at her, her eyes shone so in the moonlight, "Yes, I—remember—"

She was dancing before him and clapping her hands.

"Oh, Allister MacAllister," she cried, "Don't you know me? Why, I have my pink marble yet!"

CHAPTER XI

IN THE LAND OF BOOKS

AFTER all the stirring adventures of the night it was very late when Allister at last reached the Portage. It had not been the intention of his new friends that he should arrive at all; for, strange as the turn of human affairs may be, he was urged to spend his first night at the Front in the home of Squire Hadding. But when the little party had finally arrived at the Birches the shadow of death had already fallen and in the dismayed confusion the guest was overlooked. Allister, feeling very much in the way, slipped out, and late as it was made his way to the Portage. He was not in the least disturbed that he had not the price of a bed in his pocket and that his healthy, young appetite was already crying for food. His travels had taught him so far that it was very easy to be housed and fed, and he tramped along walking on air and re-living the thrilling experiences of the night.

But by the time he had reached the little hamlet it was wrapped in slumber and gloom. Only one place showed lighted windows, the long, low tavern at the corner. It was but a dim light, too, for even the revellers of the rail-splitting contest had gone roaring and staggering home. But when

Allister reached the one street corner and gazed about at all the silent houses in the moonlight he was filled with a joyous wonder. The little, stumpy clearing with its score of log buildings seemed to him like a great city. And then his breath came in a gasp of astonishment at the greatest wonder of all. Before him spread out the broad, white stretches of the lake all softly glowing in the moonlight. It was the first time since his childhood that his eye had caught the wonder of a far horizon. He felt a lump in his throat. He wanted his fiddle to express the thoughts that surged within him.

He was still standing gazing, unmindful of the cold, when the tavern door opened and a man came slowly down the steps and across the road, floundering knee deep in the soft snow. His hands were deep in his pockets, his shoulders humped to pull his upturned collar about his ears. His long-tailed coat was ragged but somehow had an air of jauntiness. As he hobbled and stumbled along the rough pathway he sang with incongruous gaiety in a rich, tenor—

O, who will o'er the Downs with me?

He broke the spell of Allister's nature-worship. The man paused.

"A very good evening to you," he said in a voice that reminded Allister of Julia's manner of speaking.

"Good-evening, sir," Allister said diffidently.

The man stepped closer and regarded him keenly.

"I see you are a stranger, sir, so I presume you are a fore-runner of the suppliant band due to arrive to-morrow to interview Caesar."

Allister stared. Either this was a mild mad-man like Julia's Taffy, or a clever rascal making fun of a newcomer.

"I don't understand what you will be saying," he said stiffly.

"I am not in the least surprised. That's what nearly everyone tells me. Let us try again. I am striving to convey to you the fact that I presume you are one of the great Smith clan who are due here within a few days, and who, we hear, are about to upset Caesar's throne. The poor wretches haven't enough bush. They want more! Though why any mortal should desire one tree more in this tree-cursed land is a problem I cannot solve."

Allister's ears pricked up at the mention of the Smiths. These would be the friends of the three forlorn brothers. This man evidently belonged to the gentry who had sent them unaided into the wilderness.

"No, I am not one of them," Allister said. But he knew his Julius Caesar. "I'd rather come to bury Caesar," he added truculently.

To his astonishment the tall man performed a sudden convulsive caper over the snowy hillocks.

"Shades of the mighty Will! A chance tramp who knows his Shakespeare! Come away home with me, man, and spend the night. What if you are a rebel? Come!"

As his would-be host fell upon him Allister was made aware by his breath that he was at least a

little drunk, and he was quite sure that he was more than a little crazy. But the offer of a bed was not to be despised.

"But perhaps I would be giving you too much trouble," he ventured.

"Trouble? A man who recognizes Will Shakespeare? Streams in the desert! What good fortune brought you here?"

"I came to look for work."

"To look for work! My dear Antony, I am disappointed in you. You are not the phantom of delight that I supposed when first you gleamed upon my sight. Looking for work! You can't help seeing it. I've been twelve years in the backwoods during which time I have been assiduously looking for some place where there is no work."

He was floundering away up a rough path that led from the village, calling back over his shoulder and there was nothing for Allister but to follow him.

"You see, my dear Antony," he shouted back, "We have but two classes of strangers coming to this lost hamlet in the backwoods. Those that approach us from the south, the newcomers, are full of hope, the poor devils. They believe devoutly that maple sugar grows in cakes on the trees, that all trees fall down at their approach and grain springs up in their stead. The other class approaches from the north. They are breeders of trouble, thorns in Caesar's righteous side. The poor wretches, you see, have had experience, and experience, my dear Antony, in his vale of tears known as Osborne township, is apt to

make a settler troublesome. And this expected contingent of Smiths have been hearing from their experienced brethren in the north. I presumed you were their advance agent. It would appear from your sentiments towards Caesar that you are from the north, also."

"My name is MacAllister," Allister answered stiffly. "I come from the MacAllister settlement."

"Ah, from the independent MacAllisters, eh? Strange that your speech doth not betray you! Well, well, evidently you are a product of the school your brethren were determined to have whether Caesar decreed or no."

Allister was beginning to feel that the strange man was not so crazy after all. Apparently he knew all about the the MacAllisters. He grew shy and silent.

"Yes, yes. The MacAllisters have more than once disturbed the peace of this sweet, Auburn, loveliest village of the backwoods. But you know Will Shakespeare, my dear Antony, and you shall spend the night under my roof were you blood brother to the foul fiend Mackenzie himself. My name by the way is Challoner, Norval Challoner. Though my father never fed his flocks on the Grampian Hills his son is a frugal swain who has to boil his own oatmeal."

Challoner! Allister heard the familiar name with wonder. Was it possible that this slightly crazed, ragged fellow was the great landowner?

"I, I'm afraid I will be giving you trouble," Allister protested again but the man paid no attention, and he had perforce to follow.

In the little hamlet called the Portage there had been no town-planning. Each man had set his shanty in his clearing as seemed right in his own eyes. Many had not shown sufficient respect for the Main Street to even face it. The house to which Allister was led had ignored it entirely. It was set far back in its own little circle of forest and stumps, its back turned squarely upon civilization, its face turned to the menacing wilderness like a little home at bay.

The stranger stumbled round the corner of the house into a fenced yard strewn with fire-wood and heaps of brush and rubbish. A huge, evil-smelling, garbage pile almost encroached upon the door-step. His host shoved open the door softly and listened, then beckoning to Allister, he stepped into the warm darkness.

"My sisters are asleep," the host whispered. "Like myself they are not as young as they once were and they should not have their repose disturbed."

A dim light shone at the other end of the room where the banked-up fire still glowed. In the gloom the place seemed filled with bulky objects and Allister bumped into several as he followed his host across the room. Before the fire his feet sank into a soft rug or carpet that reminded him of the elegance of Aunt Teenie's "Room." The host stuck a candle into the banked-up fire and handing it to Allister led him to the foot of a stair that rose up from the side of the kitchen.

"You'll find a bed up there," he whispered, "just at the head of the stair. And if you are the

kind I take you for you'll find some food for your mind there in the morning! Food!" He stopped in dismay. "I am letting you go to bed hungry!"

Allister protested that he was not hungry, not quite truthfully. But his host had seized the candle and was scrambling about in a cupboard beside the fire-place. He knew there was bread somewhere, he was muttering if he could only find it. But there were some boiled potatoes and some scones. They had had no butter for several days now.

Allister took the food gratefully. Anything was welcome to his young woodsman appetite. Whispering good-night he climbed the stair very carefully. Had it been a ladder he would have run up it but this was the first time he had essayed the mounting of a real staircase. A low trundle bed lay near the opening. It was soft with feathers and warm with blankets. He stretched his tired limbs gratefully. But he was sure he could not sleep. It had been such a thrilling night. He wanted to lie awake and think of his marvellous meeting with Julia Hadding. He went over every word she had said and especially the sweet, intoxicating words of praise she had heaped upon him. He thought of her sparkling eyes, of the way she ran and leaped over logs. He closed his eyes and saw her running ahead of him down the narrow forest path in the moonlight. She ran on and on, and he seemed to be pursuing her. And then she vanished and he leaped up calling her name. He opened his eyes. Through the little cob-webbed window beside his bed shone a dim light—not the

moonlight of the night before but sunlight. It was morning!

He jumped up and hurriedly pulled on his clothes. It was a disgrace for anyone to lie in bed after sunrise. There was still no sound from below and when he was fully dressed he sat on the edge of his low bed and wondered what he should do. The grey light of dawn struggling through the one small pane of the window was slowly lighting up the low loft in which he had slept. He stared about him and his eye widened with amazement. It was an attic room evidently used for storing bits of unused furniture. The place was crammed with boxes and barrels and broken chairs and tables. But the amazing thing was that it was also crammed with books. There were books on shelves along the wall, books on top of boxes, books tumbled in heaps on the floor. Allister could hardly restrain a shout of amazement. He had not dreamed that there could be so many books gathered together in one place. He who had been starved for the sight of a book he had never read! Breathlessly he read some of the titles:

Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, *Encyclopedia of English Literature*, Hume's *History of England*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Macaulay's *History of England*, several volumes! Allister read and read until his head grew dizzy. Right by his bed-side was a shabby volume called *Tales of the Scottish Border*. Ah, didn't he remember his mother telling him those tales! He opened it with trembling hands and immediately

the log walls of the attic faded away and he was far off on the wild moors of the borderland with Johnny Armstrong's men.

He was so completely caught away in the magic of the tale that it came but slowly and dimly to his senses that someone was talking near him. For some time he was half-conscious of a grumbling argument going on at his side. He dragged himself away from the story and looked about him. All was still silence and darkness in the region at the foot of the stairs. But there was a sound coming from outside. It resolved itself into the high, thin voice of his host. Mr. Challoner was evidently in a heated argument with some silent person. He was cajolling, reasoning, even threatening, meanwhile punctuating his arguments with dull thuds of some heavy object. Allister hurriedly replaced the magic volume and slipped cautiously down the stairs.

With some difficulty he found his way through the gloom of the kitchen below to the door. There was only a narrow path between boxes and barrels and furniture. He softly opened the door and made his way round to the side of the house. Here in a litter of brush wood and chips and limbs of trees he found his host. Challoner was standing in a wooden tub, and reaching out from it, he was making spasmodic thrusts with an axe at a block of wood upon which he was pouring his expostulations and arguments.

Amazement kept Allister from laughter. His host was many years older than he had gathered from his jaunty bearing of the night before. He

was bent and grey and his frame was thin and delicately made. He straightened at the sight of his guest and regarded him with a whimsical smile while he rubbed his numbed fingers.

"The cutting of kindling wood for a stove, my dear Antony, is the devil's own job. I have a feeling in my arms that tells me nature never intended me for a hewer of wood."

"O, let me do it!" cried Allister springing forward. His host handed him the axe with an elaborate bow, his hand on his heart.

"My dear young friend, for I see by the light of the morning that you are much younger than I supposed, you may have this weapon with my blessing and all of its tribe in this axe-ridden country if I had the giving of them. This is my third attempt at hewing out my something or other from the virgin forest, as the poet has it, and I vow the practice does not produce the perfection the copy-books of our schooldays promised. The first time I came out to try conclusions with this brush-heap it unhorsed me completely. The second time I cut my foot with the blasted battle-axe at the very opening of the tournament. Since then, under the pleadings of the ladies, I have ensconced myself in this fortification—a sort of round tower as you see. Though it saves me from a violent death at my own hand I cannot help feeling that it puts the enemy at an advantage."

Allister had to laugh by this time and was relieved that his host joined him. He took one look at the axe, dropped it, and running back into the house emerged with his own shining blade. He

swung it with careless ease and the block of wood fell to pieces under his strokes. His host stepped from his fortification and stood watching him with admiration, his hands in his pockets, his thin shoulders drawn up to his ears. The boy split block after block, piling up the sticks deftly at the same time with his left hand.

But when Allister had flung the last stick upon the pile and was reaching for a new tree limb his host stopped him.

"No, no! No more! Stop it, you insatiable monster! Would you split up all the forests of Osborne Township? Jove, what a swing! Not another twig shall you cut until you have had some breakfast. My word, what an artist. My dear Antony, Providence sent you to me last night."

At the side of the house was a little lean-to into which he was led. It was a small room with a bench and a basin and a tub of water, a coarse towel and soap. Allister splashed the water over himself joyously. As he scrubbed his face with the towel he looked up and was astonished to see another young man also scouring his face. He was looking at his own face for the first time. He and Little Johnny had once tried to see themselves in Aunt Teenie's mirror but they had not succeeded, being afraid of being caught in anything so effeminate. He looked at his face curiously and suddenly felt his heart-strings pulling. It reminded him strongly of his mother. He felt a great pang of homesickness. She belonged to the old world of home where Aunt Jenann and Little Johnny and all were wearying for him.

He combed his hair carefully, and turned away, all unaware that the face in the mirror was a very handsome one in its dark, gypsy beauty. He went shyly round to the kitchen door again and entered. The Challoner home consisted of several houses built one to the other. From the crowded kitchen he could see into open doors that led into rooms of unbelievable grandeur to his unaccustomed eyes. It was almost as grand as the palace where Julia Hadding lived. There were glimpses of carpets and curtains in the room beyond, and of gilded mirrors and silver candlesticks. But around him was dirt and confusion. He could not help wondering what Aunt Teenie would do in such a place. In the midst of the crowded room stood a strange article of furniture which he realized must be that wonderful thing he had heard of, a cook-stove. Two ladies were bending over it examining something in an iron pot.

"Here, my dears," cried Challoner, "This is the young man I found last night gazing at the moon and quoting Shakespeare. These are my sisters, the Misses Challoner. He is an artist with the axe I assure you. My dear Antony, if you told me your name last night I have entirely forgotten it."

"Allister MacAllister," he said, as the ladies each shook his limp hand. Then he remembered his manners. "I thank you for letting me sleep here last night," he said shyly.

"Indeed we were very much distressed, sister and I, that we had retired," said the taller lady, who seemed to Allister very grand indeed in her long, flowing skirts and little silk shoulder shawl.

"We should have been glad to welcome our brother's friend."

Allister was quite overcome by this stately reception and stood waiting helplessly.

"You must be very hungry after splitting all that wood, and we shall have our breakfast soon, shall we not, Lucy?"

Miss Lucy, younger and even frailer looking than her sister, looked up from the pot she was examining and gathered her shawl closer about her.

"I'm really afraid we shall not have any porridge," she said apologetically.

The elder sister sank into her chair. She looked up at Allister with a despairing glance. "We have really been having a very distressing time of late, Mr. MacAllister," she said, and Allister wondered if she could really mean him. "Our poor, dear Barbara passed away just a month ago, and left us bereft. Barbara was our old nurse at home, and she and her husband, Rigby, were with us ever since we came out to Canada. And poor, dear Barbara died, and Rigby went to his relatives in York. We have really been very much handicapped since." She made a helpless gesture with her small hands and her eyes filled with tears. "Poor, dear Babbie, she was so faithful."

Her brother looked up from the pot he had been examining. His jaunty air was completely gone.

"Do you suppose it needs stirring, Harriet? I seem to have a recollection that poor, dear Babbie was always stirring something over the fire."

"If you don't mind," Allister ventured, forgetting his shyness in the face of this great need, "If you don't mind I could be making the mush. My mother had no one to help her when I was little and she taught me to do a great many things."

He was heaped with apologies and remonstrances, but he took the porridge stick and attacked the matter of the breakfast as he had the fire-wood. He had made the porridge scores of times for Annie and knew just how much stirring it needed and the exact amount of salt.

In a short time the family were seated around the table each with a bowl of very good oatmeal. There was no milk or cream, but there was plenty of maple syrup, and a pot of tea which Miss Lucy managed to make.

The visitor was not allowed to leave until he promised to return for the night which he did very gratefully, remembering the books upstairs. He stepped out eagerly, his axe over his shoulder to conquer the new world. At the end of the path that led down to the village road he stood again lost in wonder. So many houses! With smoke rising straight into the pink sky from every chimney! With people moving about—such numbers of them! And then the glory of the lake spread itself out before him in a mist of rose and silver and he was lost in wonder with the lump rising again in his throat over its beauty. And then his eye fell upon the mill, and he turned his footsteps towards the Gala Water. He had always seen himself at the end of this journey going straight to Miles Hardy where he always stood in the door-

way of the mill. Allister moved down the hill and there he was, just as he had dreamed he would be! He had opened the mill door and was standing there a tall, white figure as though waiting for the moving of the waters so that mankind might be fed.

Allister stood and looked at him a moment and then went straight up the snowy path in his direction.

As he did so he heard a shout from behind, and turned. Over in the direction of the agency a big man was coming down the road waving to him. Allister went back to meet him. This was strange and wonderful but then he was living in an unreal world these days in which anything magical might happen.

The man who called him was a straight giant of a fellow, broad shouldered with great hands and feet.

"Hey, there, young fella," he cried. "Are you by any chance Allister MacAllister?"

Allister nodded in wonder.

"I thought so from Miss Jewel's description. Well, you come along with me. My name's Walker and I team for the Portage, and there's a job here that Miss Jewel said she was sure you'd like. Come along."

And Allister turned his back on the mill and the white figure in the doorway, and went over to the agency.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIGHTY MACALLISTERS

ALLISTER was hurrying along the log causeway of the carrying way towards the Portage. He had been away for over two weeks down the Waubashene River acting as guide to a contingent of incoming settlers. He was impatient to return, for he was missing the most stirring days the little settlement at the Portage had ever experienced. The election was on, with Captain Osborne running against a man from the south who was a warm friend of Miles Hardy. The Portage was the polling place for a great area and the Captain was keeping open houses at the King's Arms, and there were stirring things transpiring. But even had the place been as lonely as the Far Clearing where he had his first home he would have been impatient to return, for he was getting back to Julia.

It was three months since he had taken the great leap in the dark, and he had landed upon his feet. Jane Ann's fear that he might degenerate into a mere fiddler wandering the country like Old Angus was not likely to be realized. Three great forces were holding him in a straight course even in the midst of the rough life of the little backwoods settlement, where the church

penetrated only occasionally and where the tavern ruled.

First there was his new work. He was a sort of general business-man at the Portage store-houses.

Big Malcolm was still the Portage teamster, a little older looking, and greyer in the beard since the day when he burst upon the admiring gaze of little Allister MacAllister and Maggie Gray. He had two great ox wagons, and a third drawn by horses now, and an assistant, a gay young Frenchman named Charleboise, but whom Malcolm always called Charley Boy.

The two were very efficient in handling oxen or horses, bales or canoes, but when it came to calculating the cost to the settler of transporting a spinning-wheel from the shores of the little lake to the canoes of Big Wind's voyageurs on the river, that was far beyond the mentality of either of them.

The walls of the shanty which was used as an office were covered with figures and cabalistic signs, relics of the days when Big Malcolm tried to do the calculating himself. So Allister found himself very useful. He found, too, that old McWhinnie's training in the bookkeeping of the MacAllister school did not come amiss.

He received the tremendous salary of a shilling a day, but to the boy who had never seen money it seemed a fortune. Already he had almost enough saved up for that silk shawl that was to go north to Aunt Jane Ann at the first opportunity.

And there was the Challoner library. He had

no time to go to a carousal in the tavern with that attic of books waiting for him. He hastened to it in the evenings as a miser to his gold. He devoured *Henry Esmond* and *David Copperfield* as a starved man gulps his food. Here were all the mighty folk of whom his mother used to talk: Steele and Addison, and Samuel Johnson, and Sir Walter Scott.

And then he had stumbled upon a marvellous treasure called *The Laws of England* by a man named Blackstone. It was a mine of gold. Law was the most fascinating theme in the world. He discovered that Challoner had studied law for several terms in his younger days and he set the man to be his tutor. He would be a lawyer, would Allister MacAllister and go to Toronto, and become a great judge and send all tyrants to prison.

And there was the strongest tie of all, Julia. She came to the Challoners or to Big Malcolm's home almost every day, and by some strange instinct Allister always knew just where she would be, and always happened to be there also.

He had changed many of his opinions since coming to the Portage, especially those concerning the gentry. Why, they were the kindest, most free-spoken folk in the world. Challoner was his close friend and fellow student; Julia's father had taught him to play cricket, and even the Captain, when he happened in at the Portage store-house was gracious. Allister was beginning to be content with things as they were.

There was just one disturbing element in the good fortune of his days. The tall white figure,

standing in the mill door, had lost none of its old fascination. Big Malcolm spent many evenings at the mill, and often Allister went thither also, drawn by the lure of the man who held court there.

More and more now when Julia was not at the Challoners, and his tutor unavailable, he turned his steps towards the mill. Since the days had grown warm there was always a group of young fellows who met in the dusk at the dock below the mill, stripped and plunged off into the cool darkness, disporting themselves like a school of white dolphins. And afterwards they would go up to the mill and sit on the edge of the dam, safe from the mosquitoes in the smoke of many pipes, and listen to Miles Hardy talk.

"You've made a windrow of trees, I've no doubt, up in your clearings," he said one night to Allister.

"A windrow?" Allister cried boastfully. Hadn't they though? Why they had sent ten trees down in one grand smash at the Smith's chopping bee, just before—just last winter. His boastful voice had dropped for he was still smarting under the humiliating memory of that disastrous day.

But Hardy was weaving the event into a parable.

"That's it. You'll understand then. Trees are just like human society. Put your axe into every industry and weaken everyone and everything, and let one fall and down comes everything. And the bigger the tree at the start, the more it will

bring down. Our Government is making a wind-row of this country."

Sometimes Hardy would sit and smoke his pipe in a long silence, his deep eyes staring out on the brown water of the dam as though he foresaw the tragic events that were so soon to descend upon his country. For Miles Hardy was something of a prophet and saw visions and dreamed dreams.

Other nights he was in a more hopeful mood.

"Well, well, it isn't the thing to sit and fulminate against the wrongs of our country. Our job is to make things better. We must all work for Justice in Upper Canada. Privilege must go!" It seemed to Allister that when he mentioned privilege that he always bent his keen gaze upon him.

"Ah, well," the school-master, who was always at these gatherings would declare, "The wrongs will be righted some day."

"If someone is willing to pay the price," Hardy answered solemnly. "Make no mistake. There is never a great wrong set right without a great sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins."

"Malcolm, here, is at the right job," Hardy declared one night. "This country has come to a hard portage and we must all get our shoulders under the burdens and help everyone over. You young lads will live to see the day when the ship of state is sailing down the river with the tide, but I don't think we old codgers will."

Then there were nights when the Toronto papers came and there was high talk about the iniquities of the Government. The three-hundred

and twenty-five bills thrown out by the Legislative Council in a period of eight years; the flouts and insults heaped upon petitioners by the Governor, Sir John Colborne, and later by his successor, Sir Francis Bond Head; the removal in despair of many of the best reformers to the States; burdensome taxation; needless extravagance of the Government—all these were talked over in the shadow of the mill of Gala Water. The names of the leading reformers: Mackenzie, Bidwell, Perry, Lount, Rolph, Nelson, and a dozen others became as familiar to Allister as the names of the MacAllister clan.

Hardy would be in the midst of the election, he remembered. He quickened his pace. He was missing all the stirring events. What if the MacAllisters should come out to vote as they had promised? His heart beat high at the thought of seeing Uncle Johnny again, but his feet lagged at the thought that his Uncle Hector would be at the head of the procession. For the flame of his wrath against the unjust thrashing had not yet died out. But what did elections and such minor things matter when Julia was waiting for him at the Challoners. He had promised to be home Friday evening and she had promised to meet him there. He ran swiftly along the corduroy, slapping away the mosquitoes and humming beneath his breath the song Hardy was always singing when they gathered at the mill:

Braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,
But none so braw as the lads o' Gala Water!

As he approached the village he realized that it

was not at all the place he had left. The election had transformed the sleepy little backwoods hamlet into a shouting, noisy, thickly-populated metropolis. The space before the tavern was blocked with teams of oxen and horses, and wagons; and the sagging veranda was crowded with men. Everywhere was noise and bustle. Over at the agency, which was the polling booth, crowds of men were coming and going, and down at the mill and Hardy's house beside the Gala Water was another great crowd of oxen and wagons. As Allister came out into the village common, Captain Osborne rode up to the tavern door where he was keeping open houses for his friends, and was received with loud cheers.

Allister hurried across a back path towards the Portage store-house where he made his home. The excitement of the election stirred him. He remembered the day at Uncle Hector's fireside and the thrill it had given him to think of marching down here and voting against the tyrants. What if his people were to come? It gave Allister a strange feeling. For he would not like to see his folk voting against his new friends. Osborne was virtually his employer, and Osborne's closest friends were his. But Hardy was on the other side!

He ate a hurried supper of pork and potatoes at the lean-to against the storehouse where Charley Boy and his wife, Marie Louise, kept house and served meals for travellers. Charley Boy, was there and ready to give all the news.

Oui, bon, but the beeg boss was busy these days!

And even 'Ardy said the election was going his way. Captain Osborne was for sure spending the money. The good whiskey was flowing night and day and if everyone who drank over Monsieur 'Awkins' bar was going to vote for Gentleman Osborne then his friend 'Ardy might as well give up.

Even in his haste to see Julia, Allister could not keep away from the mill. He avoided the public square for he would not like the Captain to see one of his employees in the enemy camp. It was a warm evening and already the play of white dolphins at the end of the dock had begun. Allister stripped and plunged in, then dressed hurriedly and went up to the mill.

Hardy was sitting in his little office so thronged by his men that there seemed no hope of getting a word with him. Allister stood outside the door and waited.

It seemed that the reform candidate who lived south some miles and was not present was losing. Osborne was forging ahead. "If he carries this seat," Hardy was saying, "There will be no more justice for the settlers in Osborne Township."

Allister slipped away. He must go to the Challoners and Julia, but much of the joy of it was gone. He had smelled the smoke of battle and it was sweet to his nostrils. The old rage against injustice began to rear its head again. He went slowly up the path along the river that led to the Challoners. He felt as if he were a soldier turning his back upon the battle.

Julia had come over early in the evening, for

this was the day Allister had promised to return. She had been making scones for their late supper. In the Challoner home, meals were set on the table just whenever one could be achieved, and the three had had very little to eat the whole day and smelled the fragrant baking gratefully.

It was a warm day and the girl, flushed but triumphant, was piling the feathery product of her skill on one of the best blue china plates. Her eyes continually sought the end of the path leading into the woods. Challoner was at the kitchen door fixing a smudge for the mosquitoes, and Miss Harriet and Miss Lucy were moving about trying to help, but restless and anxious. For while they loved the lad from the backwoods, he was so kind and clever, and had been such a good companion for their brother, keeping him at his studies and away from the tavern, still they felt the heavy responsibility of having him and Julia so much together. Dear Julia surely seemed to show an unnecessary gratitude towards him since he saved her from the wolves. And while the Squire merely laughed and paid no attention to them there was no doubt that Marcia was deeply disturbed. And no wonder, for after all the boy was not quite a gentleman, though he had so many of the qualities of their own class.

Julia had gone out into the garden and was running up and down examining the vegetables and giving advice.

"Don't you think, dear Mr. Norval," she suggested, "That the potatoes need weeding? They will get very bad if something isn't done. Let me

send Taffy down to hill them. He does it so thoroughly."

"Now, my dear Jewel," Challoner protested. "You have no mathematical ability in that pretty capable head of yours or you would know that the destroying of weeds is a task that cannot be done, my child."

"But other people seem to do it, Norval, dear," Miss Lucy said coming to the door.

"But, my dear ladies, have any one of you ever faced the problem in a thorough and masterful way as it should be done? Now, consider; here are six rows of potatoes which our young friend, the noble Antony, planted. In each row ten hills; sixty hills in all. I hope, Jewel, that your school-mistresses at the Capital did their duty and that you are capable of following me in this intricate mathematical problem. Sixty potato-tops. Now, one morning I made a rough calculation and I concluded that there are at least an average of sixty weeds encroaching upon each of the sixty plants. Multiply sixty by sixty and you have a total of three thousand and six-hundred weeds, Lucy, my dear, if this is fatiguing you, tell me and I shall discontinue. Now, should I be so unwise as to remove these three thousand and six-hundred weeds with three thousand and six-hundred jabs of my hoe, anyone with even an elementary knowledge of agriculture knows that immediately ten new weeds will spring into being to take the place of those removed. Now if you will multiply three thousand and six-hundred by ten"

His sisters were holding up their hands in

helpless laughter, but Julia was not listening. A thrilling sound had caught her ear, a soft whistle from the darkening edge of the clearing, the call of the White-throat;

Come, oh, hurry-up, hurry-up, hurry-up!

A tall figure came leaping over the low brush fence at the foot of the garden, and she ran down the path to meet it. The two came slowly back to the house. In the dusk it seemed to Miss Harriet's shocked eyes that they were walking hand in hand! She asked Lucy about it afterwards in a shamed whisper. But Lucy felt it could not be possible. Julia would not forget herself so, but the way she ran to meet him was certainly . . . The gentle Misses Challoner had no words to describe it.

There was a great deal of fun getting the supper ready and in spite of their scruples the older folk could not but enjoy it. Allister split more wood and brought it in, and Julia insisted upon showing him how well she could split wood too. Then Julia had brought over some stewed rhubarb and a pitcher of cream. It had been placed in the cellar and Allister lit a candle and offered to get it, but Julia accompanied him saying he was sure to spill it if she did not. Then Miss Lucy asked Allister to bring a cold drink from the spring and he insisted that Julia should come and help him carry it—a little three-quart pail!

They went off down the dusky path into the woods swinging the pail between them. There was no hurry they both knew. Miss Harriet

would not be ready for half an hour yet. Allister dipped the pail into the cold bubbling depths and set it among the bracken. Julia dropped upon a mossy stone and broke off a big frond to keep away the mosquitoes. It was June and the warm air of the forest was sweet with the scent of musk and wild geranium.

Allister sat down on another mossy stone. "It's just years and years since I saw you!" he burst out.

Julia's head drooped. "It'll be longer before the next time," she whispered tremulously.

"Why?" Allister whispered in alarm. "What's the matter? You're not going away, Julia?"

Julia's head came up. Her deep grey eyes looked at him in anguish.

"Oh, Sandy," she whispered. "My father and Marcia say I must never see—they say I must never come to the Challoners or to Maggie's any more unless I . . . unless you"

"Unless what?" he whispered dismayed.

"Unless—Oh, Sandy, I'm afraid Miles Hardy is a rebel. They are saying he is working for that man Mackenzie and that you have been going to the mill all summer and helping him!"

She stood up, her breath coming fast, her eyes pleading with him to forgive her.

Allister stood, too, a flame in his eyes.

"Who said it?"

"Captain Osborne. Pierson watches everyone who goes to the mill. Miles Hardy is working against him in this election of course, but that isn't the worst. They are saying in Toronto that

this Mackenzie is getting up a rebellion against the King and that Miles is one of his chief helpers. And, Oh, Sandy, you wouldn't be rebel against the King, would you? Tell me!"

Allister scarcely heard her accusation, so great was the news. This was the meaning of the veiled hints Hardy had been giving him all spring as he sat at his fireside.

"You don't understand," he said at last. "Mackenzie is not a rebel. He is more loyal to his country than"—he stopped remembering who Julia was. "They just call him a rebel because he will not submit to injustice."

"I know, Sandy, that there are great injustices in the country. And you know I sympathize with you and Miles and Ellen too. But a rebellion! Oh, surely you couldn't be friends with anyone who was disloyal to our great King?"

Again he was silent. He wondered. He did not know whether he was a rebel or not. But he was suddenly aware that he greatly yearned to be on the side of Miles Hardy. His young heart was recognizing its leader. But he looked at Julia with misery in his eyes. He could not bear to refuse anything she asked.

"Sandy," she whispered brokenly, "I can't—I can never, never see you again if you go with Miles Hardy's party. It would break my sister's heart, and my father's too. And my father says if you will give your word not to have anything to do with the rebels he will get you a good position, something fine in Toronto. And Mr. Chal-

loner will give you lessons. My father gave me his word. But, Oh Sandy, if you. . . .

"But they are all wrong!" Allister burst forth. "Mackenzie is a true patriot. I know he is, and Miles Hardy is the best friend the settlers have. How can they say such things about him!"

Julia was standing leaning tremblingly against a great oak staring up at him in grief and dismay. It was the first time that any small cloud had passed over their skies since that rapturous night when they had escaped death together. All unconsciously she produced a weapon for his complete undoing. Two great tears rolled down her face and fell upon her faded cotton gown.

All Allister's flaming pride died within him. He had never dared so much as to touch Julia except when he helped her to her horse, but now he forgot everything but that he had hurt her and must make amends. He put his arms around her.

"O, Jewel," he whispered brokenly, "Jewel, what have I done?"

Her arms stole around his neck. "Oh, Sandy," she breathed, her wet cheek against his. "You wouldn't ever, *ever* let anything come between us, would you?"

"Never, never, Jewel," he whispered. And even in his rapture he wondered what he was promising.

"I wonder," Miss Harriet said anxiously, after the table had been set and the tea so long steeped that it had grown bitter, "I wonder, Norval, my dear, if you should not follow them and see if anything has happened."

"They couldn't possibly have fallen into the spring, could they?" Miss Lucy ventured.

"No, my dear," her brother assured her. "I don't think it's the spring they've fallen into, but I suspect they've fallen into something that's generally fallen into in the spring!"

His sisters gazed at him mystified, and Miss Harriet sighed and wondered if Norval hadn't been frequenting the tavern too much again since this troublesome election had begun.

The next day was the last of the election, and the village thronged with men and oxen and wagons. Captain Osborne, who had kept open house at the King's Arms for a week, moved about among his friends or rode out to the Birches, flushed with the certainty of victory. It was the day of open voting and there was no doubt that even with all Miles Hardy's influence, Henderson, the reform candidate was facing defeat. The drinking and carousing at the tavern had by this time reached a terrible pitch. The more rowdy element in support of Osborne had banded themselves together and surrounded the polls to intimidate any who might approach to vote against the candidate. There was fighting and quarreling on all sides.

Osborne, riding back from the Hermitage where he had gone for a bite of supper, was weary, and anxious for the orgy to end. It was getting beyond control. In another hour the polls would close and all the riotous supporters who had been living high at his expense would be away. He did

not dare look into the expense yet but if he won, his finances would be safe.

He was crossing the bridge when he heard a loud shriek of bagpipes and saw evidences of an unusual commotion far down the road. The men from the mill were running down to the corner with signs of great excitement. The Captain touched spurs to his horse and galloped up. There had been so much disturbance at the corner that he rather feared any unusual outburst.

Miles Hardy up in his mill almost giving up hope of the election had also heard the sound and ran out to see what was happening. He was almost at the corner when his loyal henchman, Charley Boy, came struggling through the crowd. He had been back in the bush at the McKim shanty and had run ahead with the mighty news. A tremendous crowd of reformers were coming down from the north. They had been delayed by a flood in the Black Ash swamp but they were here in time. They were the MacAllisters from their two settlements, every man of them that could lift an axe, and the MacDonalds and—yes, who did he think? The Smiths! The petted tools of the Gentleman Osborne who had been given their patents so that they might vote for him—out to vote for Henderson. They had decided to stay at home until they saw Hector MacAllister on the war-path and they left their land, every last man of them, and followed him! Charley Boy's English, never very good, failed him completely and he burst into a tornado of profane *patois*.

Miles Hardy ran out into the road. He stood

staring, stupified—"The Mighty MacAllisters!" he breathed.

Allister MacAllister had been rushing about all day trying to drown the mingled rapture and anguish that was consuming him. He was not able to think, to know what he wanted to do. But the swift movements of events in the Portage held no opportunity to sit down and formulate his thoughts. He had gone back to the little office shanty at the side of the warehouse to try to finish up some neglected work, when the high shrill note of the bag-pipes called him back. The pipes had appeared in the settlement before. Indeed the cooper who lived opposite the mill was a fairly good piper and often of an evening awoke the echoes of the lake and forest with his music. But this was a new piper, coming down the east road at the head of a great army of men. Allister ran out to where Miles Hardy was standing, his face pale, his eyes blazing. At the sight of Allister he waved his cap. "The MacAllisters! The mighty MacAllisters!" he shouted.

Allister MacAllister stood still for one moment aghast. Then he saw the giant figure at the head of the procession next to the piper. It was his Uncle Hector! And then he understood. And in that moment of glorious madness he forgot everything but that he too was a MacAllister. That he too was on the side of reform out to put down the tyrant. He flung his cap into the air and roaring like a madman, "The mighty MacAllisters! The mighty MacAllisters!" he charged down upon the

procession and fairly flung himself into their assembled arms.

Captain Osborne saw and turned swiftly to Pierson who had come running out to seek his advice. If even half those men had a vote the day was lost. "It's almost five, sir," whispered Pierson, "Within half an hour. Shall I close the polls?" And Osborne answered swiftly, "Close them."

Meantime the great procession was coming up the road. It was a time when blood ran high and men were ready with their fists, but even the bullies about the door of the polling booth stood aside at the sight of the oncoming tide. The MacAllisters had all come out to a man, twelve of them, not counting the two Frasers, had tramped every foot of the weary journey from their far clearings and they had gathered up ten MacDonalds on their way and urged them to come with them. And it was quite true, as Charley Boy had reported, that they had been followed by the whole colony of voting Smiths, who had turned traitor to the man who had settled them on his land and gone over horse and foot to the MacAllisters! And as they marched, there was not one of them stepped out so proudly or held his head so high as Allister MacAllister, not yet old enough to vote, but intoxicated with the mad joy of battle.

They marched up to the door of the polling booth, thirty strong, and a yell of triumph broke from the crowd about the door. For it was closed

and barred and on it was tacked a paper with the dismaying inscription, "Polls Closed."

Hector MacAllister did not pause for a moment, shoving the piper aside he put his shoulder to the door. It was a pioneer door, thick and sturdy and well-built, but it was like paper before that mighty onslaught. Hinges, bar, everything gave way in one splintering crash and Hector MacAllister with thirty men at his back flung it to the ground and stepped over it to the trembling clerk.

"We will be coming to vote," he said with an ominous mildness, "You will jist be giving us our papers queek."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THUNDER-BOLT

IF the MacAllister raid had meant to Gentleman Osborne only the loss of the election he might have been able to overlook the part taken by the young traitor to whom he had given a lucrative position. But the loss of the election brought with it financial ruin. The reform party had had very few victories, this one was too conspicuous to be overlooked, and the Governor had no privileges to waste on the man who had allowed the rebel miller of that backwoods hamlet to out-general him.

And so, as Miles Hardy explained to Allister, though he might be considered a small tree he had to go down in the windfall.

"But isn't it worth it when Gentleman Osborne goes too?" he asked.

Allister could have answered a hearty affirmative had it not been for Julia. What would Julia think of him? Right after their pledge to each other by the spring he had turned traitor and gone over to the enemy. He would never see Julia again, and it was impossible to feel very enthusiastic over the cause.

He was almost for taking his axe and going

back with Uncle Johnny the day the MacAllisters departed for their home. But his Uncle Hector counselled otherwise. No, there was plenty of work for him. He would soon find something to do. There was no word of their estrangement, no word of reconciliation, but Allister knew he was forgiven the moment he had flung himself into the MacAllister line.

So the MacAllisters shouldered their axes and went away back to their remote clearing, Uncle Johnny bearing the precious bundle for Jane Ann. And Allister MacAllister, adrift in the world once more, went down on a certain warm evening to talk over his fate with Miles Hardy.

Hardy took the boy alone out beside the cool dam where the sweet scent of water reeds floated up through the warm darkness. Here he disclosed to him all the Reformers' plans. The elections throughout the Province had gone so overwhelmingly in favor of the tyrants that Mackenzie felt there was nothing for the reformers now but a resort to arms. Allister was amazed to learn the extent of the secret preparations, the drilling, the gathering of arms, the forging of pikes. His position, and his friends, Hardy explained, had kept him from hearing what was being done, and Allister felt his face grow hot in the darkness, knowing that Hardy was thinking of Julia.

It was a great task, Hardy was saying solemnly, and he must consider well before he undertook it. But a MacAllister could hardly fail to be on the

side of liberty. Hardy could make good use of him right now if he would come.

And sitting there in the soft dusk beside the glimmering pond with only the cool drip, drip of the water, and Hardy's deep voice to break the stillness, the boy made his great decision. This was the young squire's night vigil. To-morrow he must go out and win his spurs. For Hardy showed him all that it meant, this being a reformer. This was not a personal quarrel. It was not alone the plight of his father and mother in their Far Clearing, nor the Wild MacNabbs reverting to barbarity, nor the MacAllisters struggling for school and church, nor the helpless Smiths stranded in the forest to starve on five acres. It was Upper Canada, his country. Tyranny and Privilege must not be allowed to get their roots deep into her new soil. There must be liberty and a chance for all, even though some, even though all the reformers should be called upon to die for it.

And so Allister went out again to face the world, and this time he did not carry his axe with which to conquer it but a gun and a belt of bullets. And again, where he had always pictured himself marching away to fight for liberty with light steps and his head high, he stumbled along with a heavy heart. For he had been a traitor to Julia. He was leaving her behind, but he could never hope to see her again.

Hardy sent him almost immediately on an important errand to the south and he wrote Julia

a letter in farewell, and gave it to Big Malcolm to give to Maggie.

He could not do otherwise, he told her. But though he might look like a traitor to her he was true to his promise. Nothing would ever, ever come between them. He recalled a glowing verse from one of Challoner's treasure-books of poetry which he had committed to memory. He set down two of the lines:

I could not love you, dear, so well,
Loved I not honor more.

It was early summer when Allister went away from the Portage, on a secret mission for Hardy. And it was late Autumn when he returned merely to shoulder his arms and march away. And in the early winter he found himself in the midst of the disastrous fight at Montgomery's Tavern, a little north of Toronto. It was such a pitiful little skirmish, scarcely worth the name of a battle. The little band of patriots struck out blindly for justice and Authority struck back with all its might. The rebels fled in all directions. Allister tried to keep near to Hardy but lost him in the darkness when a troop of mounted men rode down upon them and everyone scrambled for his life.

On the third morning after the battle, Allister found himself hiding under the hay in a settler's stable loft. He had been with Malcolm and Charley Boy the first night but another desperate chase had separated them, and he was entirely alone with no definite knowledge of his whereabouts.

While it was still almost dark he crawled out. He was shivering with cold and desperately

hungry. A nest in the corner of the loft containing four eggs took the fiercest edge off his appetite. It was a bitter December morning, with a damp chill that went to his very bones. He dared not linger till the farm awoke, the owner might be a Royalist. He slipped behind the stable and scurried across an open field, expecting every moment to be fired at by some hidden sentinel. He plunged with relief into the shelter of the woods.

Taking his direction from the rising sun over the clearing he turned and with true homing instinct tramped northward. He trudged all morning without sighting a clearing or sign of humanity and then he climbed a tall tree and took his bearings. He had taken refuge, he knew, in a large tract of forest known as the King's Bush. There was the Hurontario Road running through it, north and south, the road down which his comrades and he had marched so full of high hopes only a few days ago. Southward lay Toronto where every acre would be searched. Northward the roads would be watched. He dared not plunge farther into the woods, for it was one of those great untouched tracts, a Clergy Reserve, and even he might get lost in its depths.

He slipped down from the tree, and creeping towards the edge of the road peered out. There was a slight cut in the roadway here and he was right above the heads of anyone who might be passing. A spring of water trickled out of its mossy bed just beneath him. He was parched with thirst and wondered if he dare step into the open long enough to get a drink.

As he was standing almost decided to make a dash for it, his ears were suddenly assailed by a thrilling sound—the bag-pipes! His chilled blood ran hot through his veins. Surely anyone playing the bag-pipes should be a friend! And it was coming from the north too!

The thrilling notes swelled louder and louder, and he drew back hastily as round a curve in the road came a procession, a piper marching at their head and making the forest echoes shout to his going. Peering through the bushes Allister perceived that the little party, whether loyalist or rebel, were more inspired by what they had imbibed at the last wayside tavern than by any desire to fight. For fifty miles north of the Capital there was a tavern for every mile, and it seemed as if this riotous group had been refreshing themselves at each and every one of them.

As they came opposite the watcher they paused for a drink at the spring, and Allister stared in astonishment at the leader who was riding a horse. It was none other than Crooked Callum, the wild leader of the wild McNabbs. What was he doing here? Surely if there was a rebel in all the wilds of Upper Canada, the Wild McNabb must be one! There were about a dozen of his followers, all armed, some with old fowling-pieces, two with pikes, and one valiantly bore a scythe across his shoulder. Behind the wild shouting procession was a long pole, one end tied to the leader's horse, the other held by an armed man; and fastened to it by ropes were a half-dozen prisoners. As the boy surveyed them he almost

gave a shout, for at the very end of the line, with his hands tied behind him and a rope round his neck, his head erect, his eyes disdainful, walked Miles Hardy!

It had ever been the way of young Allister Mac-Allister to act first and do the thinking afterwards. At the sight of his chieftain in this position he uttered an Indian war whoop, and with a wild-cat leap from the bank he landed right on top of the man who was holding the pole. The victim went down in the road with a grunt, and quick as lightning Allister was up and levelled him completely with the butt of his gun.

At the same instant, with a mighty wrench, Miles Hardy broke the bonds that held him and felled with an iron fist the man who attacked him. And the next moment the two were up the bank and plunging far into the woods, a few scattered shots clattering on the stones at their flying heels.

It was all over with such lightning speed that half the drunken party of loyalists marching to the Capital under Crooked Callum McNabb to put down the rebellion did not know that anything had happened. The Piper had never stopped marching and playing, and the din of his music drowned the noise of the conflict. Crooked Callum himself was concentrating all his powers upon keeping himself in the unaccustomed position of riding a horse, and most of his followers, drinking at the spring, like Gideon's unwary warriors, drank on undisturbed.

When the party realized that their chief

prisoner had escaped there was a great hue and cry and they plunged into the woods after him. But the fugitives had had a good start. Fortunately the light December snow had not penetrated the forest and there were no tell-tale tracks. The two ran as only men can run when death is at their heels. They ran till they could run no further and the elder man's breath was coming in heaving gasps. They slackened their pace and moved on till they were far beyond the reach of the enemy. Then they sank exhausted upon the ground and crawled under a thick cedar.

"Was it you, or a thunder-bolt from heaven?" Hardy whispered when he could get his breath.

Allister told his history since they had been separated at Montgomery's Tavern. Miles Hardy had escaped into the bush also. He had planned to make his way south and try to get across to the States, for Mackenzie had already gone, but he was anxious about Ellen and the children. It seemed that the Wild McNabb had offered his services to Osborne and the Captain had given him liberty to do as he pleased with all rebels. They had burned Ellen's house over her head. Yes, that was true, Miles Hardy said, his great fists doubling up and the veins of his neck swelling. And they would have gone on to burn Big Malcolm's, too, but the neighbors stopped them. Squire Hadding likely interfered. Ellen had taken refuge with Maggie for the night and the next morning some neighbor-boy had driven her and the children across the lake to her brother. But all the women folk were alone there, for Colin

Henderson had come out to fight with his two boys, and where they were now no one knew. In jail, perhaps.

It was almost dark in the woods now, and through the heavy interlaced branches the falling snow was beginning to filter. In spite of their pressing trouble they had to give attention to their immediate wants. Their headlong flight had carried them far into the depths of the King's Bush, but Allister's keen woodsman's instincts had not allowed him to lose their bearings entirely. They were not far from the Hurontario road he had seen to that as they fled. He had been down in this region not many weeks before on a mission for Hardy and knew there must be a clearing somewhere near. He was right. It was an abandoned clearing, with an old shanty in the centre filled with hay. They crawled into its shelter gratefully. Hardy had some bread and pork in his pocket which his captors had not taken from him. They divided it, and covering themselves with the hay slept the sound sleep of exhaustion.

The next morning, stiff and sore and hungry, they sat in the hay and held a council of war.

"We must not waste our time wandering about," Hardy declared, "I am in a strait betwixt two, Sandy. I want to go to Ellen and I may only add to her danger. But I cannot turn my back upon her and seek refuge for myself."

"I'll go north," Allister declared. "I can make my way through the bush, and you make for the

States." He could not bear the look of anguish in the strong man's eyes.

Hardy struck him across the shoulder. "You thunder-bolt! And what about you when Gentleman Osborne gets his claws into you?"

"He wouldn't pay any attention to me," Allister scoffed, little dreaming how much reason Osborne had to dislike the young rebel who had shattered his dream of renewed youth.

Hardy shook his head. "You'll get a noose round your neck! He'd never forgive a Mac-Allister."

But the plan was growing in Allister's mind and becoming more alluring every minute. He would go north and look after Ellen and the family. He could stay at the Henderson farm for the winter and at least see that they got food. He did not add that he was forming wild schemes to get to the Portage somehow and see Julia.

But Hardy would not hear of it. He could not go without seeing Ellen, and Allister had better go south and work his way to the States. Hardy had the names of the men at whose place it would be safe to ask for help.

But neither would Allister hear of this. He would not quit his chieftain. Who knew, he declared, but the battle might have gone against the enemy in another quarter and perhaps while they were hiding, their friends were victorious. But Hardy shook his head.

"It does not matter so much what becomes of us, Sandy. We have struck our blow for freedom. I think we have lost the day but the cause is not

lost. This uprising is the only thing that would shake the tyrants out of their stupidity. We may have lost the battle but we have won the war.”

So, in spite of their better judgment, they turned their faces northward, the older man driven by his fears for his loved ones, the younger eager to meet anything new in the way of adventure.

By keeping to the woods, not too far from the road, they managed to hold their direction and yet avoid all settlers. But food and shelter were necessities and towards evening they found themselves approaching a clearing. As Hardy was a well-known figure it was deemed safer for him to remain behind while Allister went forward to reconnoitre.

There was a lone shanty in the middle of the clearing and another that served as an ox-stable. Smoke was coming out of the chimney of the home shanty, and Allister ventured towards the door. He was ragged and dirty and with a week's beard on his face, and felt sure not even Aunt Jenann would recognize him.

He took the precaution to knock at the door, and it was opened by a bare-foot woman with wild hair and untidy homespun dress. The cabin behind her was swarming with dirty half-clad children and reeking with some evil smelling mess in a pot over the fire, but the grace of hospitality bloomed even in this fetid atmosphere. When he asked for a bite of supper she held up dismayed hands. Sure, wasn't her bakin' just this minute put into the bake-kettle and not a bite of bread

was there in the shanty. But it would be baked again the time her man came home from the chop-pin' and he must just sit down and wait. But that was what Allister dared not do. He moved away, thanking her, while she stood at the door calling after him and wringing her hands that she should send away a hungry man from her door.

Allister had turned a bend in the narrow bush trail when he heard a childish shout behind him, and a half-grown girl came bounding down the path, leaping over all obstacles like a fawn.

"Mammy found two praties left from dinner," she called, "She'll warm them in the fire if ye'll jist come back and wait a bit!"

The kindly insistence warmed the fugitive's heart, but Hardy had warned him not to linger. No, he could not wait, he declared, and the fawn went bounding back, her dirty little face expressing her disappointment. Allister had gone only a few yards when he heard her shrill, little voice behind him again. Once more she was leaping towards him, her bare, brown knees flashing out from under her upturned skirt in which she carried something. She proffered the treasure shyly.

"The praties!" she gasped, "Sure, they're cold, but Mammy says ye're awful welcome."

Deeply grateful Allister accepted them and went on his roundabout way back to where he had left his friend. Hardy was not behind the brush heap where he had left him seated. Allister hid and waited anxiously. Then he whistled softly but there was no answer.

Then suddenly he heard Hardy's whistle deeper

in the woods. It was the sharp sound that meant a warning of danger. Allister slipped deeper into the underbrush and waited. He could hear the bark of a dog from the clearing he had left, but there was no further sound.

Even with the prospect of the gallows before him it was impossible for him to remain inactive with the terrible fear that Hardy might be in trouble. He crawled out of his hiding place and made his way cautiously towards the place where the whistle had sounded. He came suddenly upon a narrow bush road evidently leading towards the south from the shanty he had just left. Then the sound of a wagon and men's voices broke upon his ears and sent him scrambling up a tree. It was quite dark in the forest by this time but the open road and the clearing beyond were light enough to discern objects distinctly. And the boy's sinking heart was forced to grasp the dismaying truth; Miles Hardy was once more a prisoner, hopelessly a prisoner this time, seated on the wagon securely bound between two armed men.

CHAPTER XIV

JEWEL TO THE RESCUE

ALL day a cold spring rain had been swirling over the grey lake, and a cold spring wind had been lashing the leafless branches and the slender white stems of the birch trees. It was a weeping, lowering day outside and no less dreary within the walls of the shabby drawing room at the Birches. The rain washed violently against the small panes of the low window where all afternoon Julia Hadding had sat, her face, which was pressed against the wet glass, stained with tears and drawn with pain.

Her sister sat by the fire, her sewing fallen to the floor, her handkerchief to her eyes. Squire Hadding paced up and down between them twisting into a string a letter he had just been reading. He paused before the bowed and shaking figure of his younger daughter.

"I didn't think you would feel so about it, Jewel," he said brokenly. "Don't cry so, child. They may not catch him. He may be in the States now with Mackenzie. Oh, Jewel, don't!"

"You know it wouldn't do in any case, darling," her sister interposed falteringly. "He belongs to a different class, dear, and" . . .

The younger girl whirled upon her. "And is that any reason why I should not care that he is

to be hunted to death and hanged?" she demanded violently. "It didn't matter about his class when he saved me from being eaten by wolves! Captain Osborne is cruel and wicked and I hate him!" she flung out at her sister.

"Hush, hush, dear child," her father said, while Marcia's head drooped, poor Marcia who was still waiting hopefully for the denounced one to ask her to marry him. "Wilfred has done his best to save him I have no doubt. He put in a plea for Malcolm, though he fought against him, and he will no doubt be let off. But Miles Hardy was a leader, and young MacAllister was his right hand man. McNabb swore it was he who violently took their prisoner away from them. What could Osborne do?"

"If he said the word they would drop the matter and let him get away, if he is in the country," Julia cried. "But he won't. He'll rake even the MacAllister Settlement. He hates the MacAllisters because they spoiled his election."

Squire Hadding ran his hands through his hair with a gesture of despair. In all the troubles he had encountered in this new land he had never come up against anything more baffling than this, his favorite child. She was so headstrong and determined with such decided opinions upon things that young ladies were not supposed to know anything about. And now it wrung his heart to see her in such desperate grief.

She had given him no rest night nor day till he had journeyed to the Capital to intercede with Osborne for the life of their friends. Osborne was

still at headquarters in command of his Company. He had the task of bringing to justice all the rebels that had come from within the bounds of his district. Hardy and Big Malcolm Walker had been captured of the ringleaders, but young Charleboise and Allister MacAllister were still at large. Captain Osborne sent a gracious message to Maggie. He would do his best to obtain a pardon for Malcolm. It was plain his teamster had been led astray by Hardy. But he could not promise to do anything for young MacAllister. He knew it would be useless. The fellow was a firebrand. Pierson knew that it was he that had planned the MacAllister raid on the last day of the election. Hanging or banishment was too good for some of these rebels who had taken up arms against their King. Not even Julia dreamed that Osborne had another reason for enmity against Allister, the gay, young rebel who had taken without an effort what he coveted most.

"He is not caught yet, Jewel," her father said for the tenth time, looking round the room helplessly.

"But he will be," she said stonily, her face still pressed against the streaming pane.

Since the day that Taffy had come stumbling home from Maggie's with Allister's farewell note Julia had had no word from him. He had been seen armed at the Montgomery Tavern fight, however, and was listed with the condemned. There were terrible rumors abroad as to what would be done with the rebels, rumors that said that Miles Hardy was to be hanged with seven other leaders,

and that big Malcolm and the others were to be banished to some distant land.

The village was in such a disturbed state that Julia had not ventured even to visit Maggie since the burning of the Hardy home. Maggie's house had been spared and she was there with her children weeping for Malcolm in terror lest her home go next. The burning of Ellen Hardy's home and her flight across the lake had been hotly resented by the villagers and a wave of sympathy for Hardy and the other rebels swept over the community. But no one dared express sympathy. Houses were being searched daily for hidden rebels. Pierson had been left in charge by Captain Osborne and he was doing his work thoroughly. They would catch Allister yet, Julia knew, and a wave of deadly sickness came over her at the thought.

Her life had been a lonely one until that magic day when she ran into the Black Ash swamp and found him coming to meet her. Youth had called irresistibly to youth. From that night on the roof he had filled up every moment of her thinking. If he had asked her in that last note he had sent to come with him into the wilds she would have followed him on the instant. What did she care whether he was a rebel or not? He was Sandy.

She leaned against the window pane heaving an occasional dry convulsive sob, until her father in desperation left the room. He had only one refuge from his troubles. He would ride up to the village and see Challoner and they would drown their

worries in a bottle. Hawkins always had a warm fire at the tavern.

When he had gone Marcia came over and stroked the girl's tumbled, brown hair in silent sympathy.

"See, darling," she said at last, "the ice is breaking in the lake. And there is the sun."

Julia did not care whether the ice ever broke up again or not—that great event of other springs. But her arm stole round her sister's neck. She had spoken harshly to Marcia, and tried to make amends in a dumb way. Marcia was always so good and patient.

The sisters held each other close in silent sympathy, the red windy sunset faded from the sky in grey ashes. Julia arose, desperate for some form of action.

"I think I shall go and see if Merrin has put away the supper things," she said, and Marcia let her go, relieved to see her take some interest in her household tasks again.

Julia walked slowly down the dim, chill hall towards the kitchen. In the year since her mother's death the girl had mastered most of the arts of housekeeping. She had learned to make bread and butter, learned them all in a mist or rose-colored dreams in which she made them in her own home. But there had been no supper to-night. The shadow of death had come too near. As she opened the kitchen door she was assailed by a familiar sound of scolding. Old Merrin was not so helpless that she could not scrub the kitchen floor to shining whiteness nor so blind that she

could not see the muddy tracks that Taffy was wont to trail across its pure surface.

"Why, Taffy, what brings you back? Didn't you go with the Squire? . . ." Julia asked.

The boy was regarding her with that look of cunning on his simple face that always announced a secret. Julia pulled him out into the passage way. "What is it, Taffy? Did Maggie send any word?" she whispered.

With an air of great importance Taffy unbuckled the straps of the leather bag that always hung over his back, and rummaged till he found a small, wet piece of paper. Julia snatched it and ran to the kitchen fire. It was from Maggie. Could she come? There was news.

She had news of Allister. Julia knew it and her heart leaped with a stabbing pain. Maggie had friends who brought her every scrap of intelligence regarding the fugitives. Julia stormed upstairs and into her riding clothes.

"Maggie has sent for me, Marcia," she cried as her sister followed her in alarm. "I must go to her."

"But, Jewel, dear, is she ill? It is quite dark and the rain"—

"The rain has stopped."

"But Papa says it is not safe for you to go to the village, dear. Send Taffy with a message."

But Julia was flinging on her coat unheeding. "I've got to go, Marcia!" she cried wildly, "don't try to stop me!" She called back as she ran down the stairs. "If Papa is at the Challoners I shall come home with him."

She caught up the lantern and darted out to the stable, Taffy whimpering at her heels. "Where you goin', Miss Jewel? Taffy wants to go too! Take Taffy!"

She helped him saddle Bateese with feverish haste. "No, Taffy," she said and he knew by her tone that he dare not coax more. "I am going alone to see Maggie. Be a good boy and perhaps I shall bring you some sweeties."

Bateese knew his mistress so well that he did not need to be told that he must hurry. He went storming down the wet road, rather indignant at such a pace when there was scarcely any sure footing. He was prancing and snorting with excitement when she leaped from his back at Maggie's door.

The shanty was all in darkness and the door was barred. Julia knocked gently, "Maggie," she called, "It is I, Miss Jewel."

The door opened and Maggie's drawn face and swollen eyes appeared. She looked fearfully over the girl's shoulder.

"I'm alone, Maggie. Stand there Bateese, like a good boy." She slipped inside. "What is it, Maggie? Have you news?"

Maggie had cradled this girl on her bosom and her heart swelled at the sight of her fear-stricken eyes. They were just two women each in terror for the life of her man. She gathered Julia Harding into her arms. "Och, hoch, Miss Jewel, darling. Did you come alone along them fearful roads?"

"Allister!" faltered Julia, "have you heard about him?"

Maggie shut the door and put up the bar. Then she dropped on a bench and burst into tears.

"Oh, Miss Jewel, there's nothin' but bad news these awful days! They'll all be hanged, ivery one of them. My Malcolm, and the beautiful lad and all. Och, och, that they iver raised their hand against the Captain. It was an evil day, an evil day!"

Julia caught her by the shoulders and shook her. "What have you heard, Maggie? Tell me at once!"

The habit of obedience asserted itself. Maggie whispered her news between her sobs. Pierson and the new constable had got news of Allister. Willie Collins's boy, the lad that worked in the office, listened to them talking through the partition. Allister was hiding at Colin Henderson's place across the lake, with Ellen Hardy. Her brother had been taken prisoner and his two sons and Ellen and Colin's wife were there alone with the children. Allister was hiding in the stable by day and working at night. Some black-hearted villain had seen his lantern and had come and told. There was a big reward for him. And Pierson and this other devil who was helping him were leaving to-night to get him. They were at the tavern now getting their supper, Willy Collins had just slipped in to tell her.

The baby wailed from his deep, wooden cradle by the fire and Maggie took him up and nursed

him, apparently unconscious of what she was doing.

"Willie Collins says it's true, every word. His lad heard all they were saying. They'll all be hung," she cried, breaking again into a wail.

Julia Hadding said not a word. She rose, and pulling down the bar stumbled blindly out of the little shanty. She climbed upon Bateese's back. Maggie ran to the door and called, but she did not hear. The pony moved out upon the road and she let him have his head with no idea of where she was going. He turned up the rough, stumpy street that led to the tavern as he did nearly every night to meet his master. As she came in sight of the tavern door Julia saw it open and in the stream of light two men stepped out. They mounted the horses that were tied to the veranda posts. Julia moved the pony off the road into the shadow of a great, tall, stump. The little French Canadian sank deep in the soft, yielding snow but he stood still at her whispered command. She held her breath to listen as the men passed her.

She caught Pierson's voice and another she did not recognize.

"If it hadn't been for that rain to-day and the thaw," the strange voice complained, "We'd have gone straight across and saved twenty miles." And he swore at all rebels and the bad, melting roads one must take to get them.

The sound of their horses' hoofs sloshing through the snow and water died away. Julia guided the pony's scrambles out of the depths and up onto the road. She stood for a moment think-

ing desperately. It was some twenty miles around the lake, by a rough, bush road. It was only three across to the southern shore where Allister lay waiting for his death. Scarcely knowing what she did she touched the pony and cantered down to where the winter road ran out upon the lake. She looked across. It would be madness! But it was madness to sit here while Allister was done to death. She urged the pony straight out upon the lake.

"Sandy!" she cried aloud, "I'm coming!" She remembered with a leap of her heart that Charley Boy had ridden across one spring day when the ice had broken up, leaping from cake to cake in sheer frolicsome bravado, because he knew that Marie Louise was watching him from the mill. She could do what he did. Like another brave woman who risked her life for loved ones, she whispered as she urged her horse into a gallop, "I go . . . and if I perish, I perish!"

The ice was solid for more than a mile from the shore and the pony flew down the watery road splashing his mistress to the top of her head. It was not long before she could see before her in the soft, diffused light the black stretches of open water with the cakes of ice floating white and ghostly on its surface. As he came out on the ice that was swimming in water Bateese slowed up and picked his way carefully. Then came a great crack. He stepped daintily over it and steadied himself as he felt the ice sway beneath him. The cracks grew wider, became great breaches. Bateese stepped carefully planting his hoofs

firmly before taking the next step. A little breeze came across the open lake and the ice island swayed. He shivered as he stepped over to the next unsteady footing.

And all the time his mistress talked to him as she knew he loved her to talk. She laughed to him, sang to him, coaxed, cajoled, scolded, flattered. "Clever Bateese! Ah, that was the boy! Steady there! Now another. Coward! What was he waiting for? On, on, there! Lazy bones! Didn't he know that a man's life was hanging on his success! Ah, that was the clever lad! Now, again!"

A yawning chasm of black water opened out beneath his feet. There was nothing for it but to jump now. But Bateese was a great jumper. She lifted him with a sharp command. "Over there! Over!" Must she use the whip? "Up with you!"

He leaped, staggered, regained his balance. Leaped again, and yet again.

They were in the midst of it now. Heaving ice cakes and swirling, black water and wind blowing up from the open lake. But the girl drove on relentlessly. The gallant, little horse obeying the urgent voice that never stopped, now soothing and encouraging, now sharply commanding. He leaped, staggered, regained his footing, leaped, staggered, recovered, again and again and each time she cried out in praise of him. "Hurrah! There he had done it again! Gallant lad! Now, once more! Up, lazybones! There, that was a bad one. Yonder was a big jump! Over!"

On he went sweating, staggering, while the wild, streaming wet girl clinging to her saddle

drove on with but one thought burning in her brain—the thought that over there was Allister with Pierson and the other emissary of Osborne riding down upon him.

And now the terrifying spaces were growing narrower. The worst was past. Now there were only large cracks between the ice cakes, now solid ice beneath his feet! With a shout of triumph Julia sent him flying over the solid space between her and the opposite shore. Something of his mistress's urgency of spirit had been conveyed to the little pony for he snorted and flung up his heels and made off on a mad gallop.

But he was soon floundering in the deep snow and Julia discovered that they had drifted down with the wind and were away from the road. They were facing the steep back of the southern lake shore, but where was the road? There was nothing but a solid wall of forest ahead of her. She rode along it in feverish impatience against the delay. Bateese was in a lather of foam and she was as wet as if she had really been in the lake. Her clothing hung from her dripping and her long braid of hair switched about her like a whip lash.

There it was at last! The little fisher-hut that marked the entrance to the land road. She sent the pony up the steep bank and on a mad gallop inland. She was tormented with the idea that she had been hours and hours crossing the lake. It seemed as if it must be near morning and the pursuers would be there ahead of her and Allister would be gone.

And then it came to her with a terrifying start that she did not know exactly where Ellen Hardy's brother lived and would have to take the risk of stopping to enquire her way. As if in answer to a prayer she came upon a homestead near the road. As she passed the shanty she noticed a dim light. She leaped from her horse and knocked gently with her riding whip. She could hear the gruff bark of a dog inside and a muffled conference. These were bad times and the pioneer door did not open so willingly to the chance wayfarer. Then a voice called, "Who's there?" It was a woman's voice, and Julia took courage. "Could you tell me which house Mr. Colin Henderson lives in?" she asked. The door opened a small way with a big dog raging to get through, and a scared-looking woman peered out holding her clothing on with one hand and a candle with the other. Julia did not realize what a terrifying sight she must be until the woman suddenly cried out:

"The saints preserve us!"

Julia forced a reassuring smile. "I—we were riding down to Mr. Henderson's—Mr. Colin Henderson's," she said with great presence of mind, "and we seem to have got off the road. Which is his house, please?"

The woman looked suspicious. There were strange doings these days and everyone knew that Colin Henderson was a rebel.

"Colin Henderson's! Sure he lives a good three mile down the road, ma'am, the third clearin' to the left." Hospitality suddenly awoke. "Mebby ye'd step in a min'it, till my man gets up." She

peered over Julia's shoulder to see who was with her.

"Who's that, Ma?" cried a voice from the interior. "Who's askin' for Colin Henderson's at this time o' night. Tell 'em to wait till I get me pants."

Julia fled in terror. The man might be a spy of Pierson's! She leaped upon Bateese and went fleeing down the road as if all the constables of the Family Compact were at her heels. This part of the country was better cleared than that north of the lake, not being encumbered with so many great estates and the road was passable. But she had to check her tumultuous speed lest she come to grief. The next clearing had a light. Perhaps then it was not so very late. Two huge dogs came out with roars like blood hounds but Bateese flung up his heels and left them far behind. The second clearing was passed in safety. And then it seemed as if endless miles of forest flew by before she reached the third. It was the third the woman had said, what if she had told her wrong to mislead her? She must try it anyway. Away back there she could see the dark bulk of buildings but there was no light. There was only a footpath up the lane from the road and Bateese stumbled and sank. A dog set up a loud barking from the house. The stable and barn were a little nearer. Julia rode into the barn yard and came to a standstill beside the stable. On one side were the remains of a straw stack, on the other a manure heap. From one of the buildings came the warm odor of oxen, and soft movements in the straw. Julia sat

and held her breath and listened. Maggie had said that Allister lived in the stable. She fancied there was a rustling in the straw of the shanty loft. Just above her head was a dark opening into the hay mow. The soft movement seemed to come from there. She held her breath but there was only the soft nosing of Bateese against the straw stack. And then Julia remembered the little whistle with which Allister always announced his arrival at the Challoners, the whistle she had always answered—the call of the white throat—"C-o-m-e, oh, Hurry-up, Hurry-up, Hurry-up!" She leaned towards the dark opening and whistled it softly.

There was a sudden crashing sound in the hay and a head shot out of the opening above her.

"Sandy!" she cried with a sob.

"Jewel!" She was Squire Hadding's daughter and might be suspected of leading his captors to him, but not a shadow of suspicion dimmed the rapture of Allister's heart. He leaped from the window and she fell from her saddle into his arms.

"Jewel, Jewel!" was all he could whisper. She held him close for a moment, and then pushed him from her.

"Away, Sandy! Go, quick! They're after you! Pierson and the constable will be here to-night. They're riding round the lake. Take Bateese and go, Sandy!"

"Where? How?" stammered Allister. "How did you get ahead of them?"

"I crossed the lake."

"The lake? The ice is broken."

"I know. But Bateese brought me. He jumped! Go, Sandy. They'll hang you if they catch you and if anything happens you, Sandy, I shall die, you know that, Oh, Sandy!"

"I'll go, Julia, I'll go. But you didn't ride across on the broken ice!"

"Bateese did it. He—jumped," sobbed Julia.

And with no volition or knowledge of what he did, Allister slipped to his knees in the snow at Julia Hadding's feet.

CHAPTER XV

JEPHTHA'S DAUGHTER

THEY hanged Miles Hardy one bright April morning when the Gala Water foamed and fretted against the dam as though calling him to come and free it, and the sunshine beat upon the nailed-up door of the silent mill where he had so often stood in the sunshine, a white, priest-like figure at his ministry of giving bread to his people.

When Big Malcolm regained his freedom he tramped the length and breadth of Waubaushene county with a petition for Hardy's life. It was signed by almost the whole population, for there was scarcely a clearing within thirty miles of the Portage that had not felt his helping hand in time of need. Ellen Hardy journeyed to Toronto, and falling on her knees before the Governor presented the petition for her husband's life. But this strong token of the deep love of a whole countryside only made it seem more imperative to the men in authority that he be put out of the way, and in all the hearts that perished in the disastrous struggle for freedom there was none more unselfish than the miller of Gala Water.

Many another gallant reformer perished with him, for hanging and banishing were the order of the day. Many more escaped; Mackenzie, with a

price of a thousand pounds upon his head, was safe in the States, and one of his most loyal young followers, also with a price upon his head, was, like Prince Charlie, safe in hiding among his own people, for here, too, there was "Nane that wad betray." When Julia sent him off flying before his pursuers, he was wise enough not to attempt to escape to the States. He knew that not even Osborne's long arm could reach him in the remote fastness of his own land and while the authorities watched the border for him he was far away reclaiming the little potato patch which his father had cleared twelve years before. He was not alone, for Little Johnny and Red Sandy's Maggie had journeyed hand in hand over to the English Block where a travelling preacher was holding services, and standing before him were made one. And they were here with him in the Far Clearing. But he was desperately lonely nevertheless, more lonely than he had ever been in his life before. And then one hot summer day when he was hilling his potatoes between the stumps there arose the barking of a dog from the edge of the clearing and a shout of new voices, and here came Hughie and Johnny Peter running out of the bush shouting and waving their caps, the bearers of great and glorious news. The young Queen had pardoned all the rebels. Mackenzie was on his way back to his native land and all might walk abroad again free and unafraid.

Allister went down through the long forest trails to the Portage on winged feet. But it was autumn before he reached there, and the forest

was dressed in bronze and gold and crimson and flaming scarlet. Chipmonks scurried across his path and the wood-pigeons descended in blue clouds upon the clearings. Autumn's haze lay at the end of the long forest trails. Walking was too slow for his impatient spirits and he hired a horse from the Murphys with his last shilling, and came thundering up to the door of the Birches one golden October morning.

Ever since the news of the pardon, Julia had been waiting for him. She marked off each day on the calendar, telling herself she was this much nearer his return. Every morning she looked down the rough lane to the highway and wondered if this was the day he should come; every night she knelt in her little room under the eaves and prayed that he would have a safe journey.

So when she looked down the sun-flooded lane that October morning she was not surprised to see him. But she had not expected him on horseback and her dazzled eyes had to look twice before she realized that it was surely he. She had always thought she would run far down the lane to meet him and she flung wide the door, but her knees, strangely, gave way beneath her, and instead she fell over the threshold into his arms.

But Allister would not cross the threshold. The sight of Hardy's ruined home and the mill in Pier-son's hands had revived all the bitterness of his friend's execution. He could not enter the house of a man who was friend to the one who slew him. So he stood rigid by his horse's head in the October sunshine, his back to the house, while Taffy

sulkily brought round Bateese and Julia dressed to ride away with him.

And so they rode away together down the birch lane in the sunshine, and in spite of all the tragedies that had beset their young feet, they were still young and they could not but be happy.

The minister who had joined Little Johnny and Maggie Red was waiting for them at Malcolm's. When he had given them his benediction and gone they sat under Maggie's grape-vine at the side of the shanty and planned what they should do.

For the third time the world lay before Allister MacAllister ready to be conquered. But his last battle with it had taught him many things. He was older by many years than the lad who had marched off less than a year ago with his gun over his shoulder to put down all tyranny. Something drew him irresistibly back to the old MacAllister settlement. Some inner voice whispered that here rather than out in the world of strife he could serve his country and help work out her destiny. Back behind the Barrier was the real Front, where the battle raged. There was a new day dawning for the settlers. As Hardy had said they had lost the battle but they had won the war, and he had not died in vain. What might he not do in the Far Clearing, now that the Barrier was soon to be removed, and all the Smiths were moving over to be his neighbors and needed his helping hand?

But here was Julia at his side and he must not take her away from all the comforts to which she had been accustomed. And then his heart thrilled

as she looked up at him her eyes shining with a great purpose and exclaimed:

"Oh, Sandy, we'll go back to your own Clearing and start there, won't we? Oh, please, Sandy, let's go!"

"Oh, but you couldn't, Jewel," he cried. "It's so far and so lonely, and the work is so hard."

But she laughed.

"Why, Sandy! would you lose your land! You just mustn't. Let's go!"

It was another radiant morning of scarlet and gold when they rode out to the Birches to take their farewell. Allister stood again by their horses' heads while Julia prepared for the long journey into the bush. Taffy came round the house and putting his head up against Bateese sobbed aloud.

Though the sunshine was warming the fields and forest the chill of autumn had fallen indoors. Squire Hadding sat huddled over a smouldering fire, overcome by this last and worst disaster.

Osborne was ruined financially, he himself was in little better condition and now the light of his home was to be taken away. Challoner, who had come over to comfort him, sat on the other side of the fire, all his whimsical gaiety failing before this new sorrow.

Upstairs Julia crammed a last few things into her bag and turned to the drooping figure of her sister by the window.

"Marcie," she whispered. "I'm ready. You understand, don't you dear, I must go."

"Yes, yes, dearest," the elder girl said, choking

back the tears. "Follow your heart, Jewel. You have the courage. Life without love is dreary."

They clung to each other for a moment in silence. "You've been sister, and mother, and everything" . . . Julia faltered.

Marcia straightened quickly. She must not let Julia break down now.

"And I'm going to be still, child," she cried. "You'll be back often. This isn't farewell, Juju. Don't forget your muffler, dear," she added in a matter-of-fact tone.

Julia smiled radiantly through her tears, flung the scarlet muffler across her shoulders and ran downstairs to her father's office.

At the sight of the bowed figures by the fire the radiance died within her. She ran across the room and kneeling by her father's chair took the bowed, grey head against her breast.

"My Daddy," she whispered, trying to be playful, "I've been a bad girl."

Challoner walked away to the window and looked out to where Allister stood inexorably by the horses' heads.

"Jewel!" Hadding cried. "You're leaving me! I had hoped he would let you stay! You're going off to a hard life in the backwoods!"

"It won't be the backwoods long with Sandy and me there!" she cried.

Challoner turned, "Come Hadding," he cried, "we must give the bride a proper send-off!"

She kissed them both and ran out to where Allister stood in the sunshine. Marcia ran down the stairs and the three came out and shook the

hand of the young rebel who was carrying off their treasure.

They stood at the open door side by side, watching her ride away. She turned in her saddle and threw kisses alternately at the group at the front door and the kitchen window where Taffy and Merrin were sobbing aloud. She waved and smiled gaily until the turn in the birch avenue hid her from view.

And the next moment there came raging past the door a wild dishevelled figure, that sped down the lane after them: Taffy the Welshman, who had been heavily bribed to stay at home, racing after Julia, and howling like a lost child whose mother was forsaking it.

The sight of Taffy departing so uproariously with the pair on their honeymoon, helped a little to lighten the gloom of the empty house as they turned back to it. It was impossible not to smile. Mat McKim brought a note from the bride the next week saying that she had been compelled to take Taffy with her for he would have died if he were left behind. She would send him back some day soon for she knew how badly he was needed. But the faithful Taffy never returned to the Birches.

Marcia shut herself in her room and for a long time Hadding sat huddled over the fire, his friend sitting by him in silent sympathy.

"Do you think," Challoner ventured at last "You might not be wise to give the young rascal the work of looking after this place. He has

brains, you know. He knows enough about the mill to manage it for Pierson"—

Hadding shook his head.

"I offered him everything I could think of to keep him here. He refused everything. He will have none of us, Norval."

Hadding rose and walked up and down before the smouldering fire.

"I had great plans for Jewel," he said dully. "And now she has gone away to the hard life of a backwoodswoman. And it is I who have sent her, Norval. Yes, Miles Hardy was right. If these MacAllisters had been given the chance they should have had this boy would have been in a far different position to-day. You know what he did with the small chances he had. But we refused them schools and roads and everything they had a right to. We kept down the underbrush, as poor Osborne is always saying, and now it is like to choke out the tall timbers!"

Challoner was staring into the fire helplessly. "The trouble with us, Percy," he said, "is that we are little men! Yes, little men, and we were given a big task, The making of a new country. We weren't big enough for it. It needed statesmen."

"And Miles Hardy and his kind could have done it, and we've hanged them all."

There was a long silence. With the departure of Julia the sun had hidden its face, a cold, grey autumn mist was drifting over the blanched face of the lake. Hadding rose and poked the sulky fire. His movements were those of an old man.

"Do you remember the story in the Bible of

Jephtha's daughter?" he asked. Challoner nodded dully.

"Like him I vowed a foolish vow. I offered all I had for that miserable stretch of Black Ash swamp. I have sacrificed all my family for it, and now the one on whom I depended most, my youngest, has had to be given. She has gone into the wilderness to her death. Jephtha's Daughter!"

There was a long, heavy silence. Then Hadding arose. "Come away, come away, Norval, I'll go mad if I sit here. Let's go down to the corner and see if Hawkins can cheer us up a little!"

As they rode slowly down the birch avenue, heads bent, the other two, riding swiftly down the bush trail hedged with flaming woodbine and scarlet sumach, paused for a moment before plunging into the forest. Ahead of them arose a great sound of chopping, a mighty chorus of axes, and blue columns of smoke rose far above the tops of the elms.

Julia pointed eagerly. "See, Sandy, it's the new Government Road they're beginning, our road!"

Allister sat staring. Their road! The road north to the MacAllister Settlement! It was a new day, the Barrier was gone.

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The forest barrier

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